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AGNES.

VOL. I.

AGNES.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF

"THE LIFE OF EDWARD IRVING,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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COVENT GARDEN.

WHEN I PLACE THIS BOOK UNDER YOUR INVOCATION,

MY DEAR ELLEN,

IT IS TO ONE OF THE HAPPIEST OF WOMEN

That I Inscribe

THE STORY OF A SAD WOMAN'S LIFE;

BUT THERE IS NOTHING IN IT THAT WILL HARM YOU,

ANY MORE THAN IN THE

TRUE AND WARM AFFECTION WITH WHICH,

FROM THE DARKER SIDE OF LIFE,

I OFFER IT TO YOU

WHO ARE IN THE LIGHT.

PREFACE.

IT is a shabby expedient to begin a novel with a theory; but it may, perhaps, be excused on the plea that the novel has not been constructed to suit the theory, though the author feels herself justified in making use of one to account for her work. It has always been my opinion that, as the great value of fiction lies in its power of delineating life, there may be cases in which it may assume to a certain extent the form of biography: I do not mean of autobiography, which is sufficiently common in novels; but that the writer of fiction may occasionally be permitted to supplement the work of the serious biographer—to depict scenes which never could be depicted as happening to any actual indi-

vidual, and to reveal sentiments which may be in many minds, but which none would care in their own person to give expression to. I do not believe that there ever was, or could be, in this world, a *wholly* true, candid, and unreserved biography, revealing all the dispositions, or even, without exception, all the facts of any existence. Indeed, the thing is next to impossible: since, in that case, the subject of the biography must be a man or woman without reserve, without delicacy, and without those secrets which are inevitable even to the most stainless spirit. Even fiction itself, which is less responsible, can in many instances only skim the surface of the real. Most people must be aware, in their own experience, that of those passages of their lives which have affected them most they could give only the baldest description to their friends; and that their saddest and supremest moments are hidden by instinct in their own hearts, and never find any expression. It is only in the region of pure invention and imagination that the artist can find a model who has no secrets from him, but lies all open and disclosed to his investigation.

Life thus taken up in its general course is, no doubt, full of broken threads and illogical conclusions, and lacks altogether the unity of the regularly constructed fiction, which confines itself to the graceful task of conducting two virtuous young persons through a labyrinth of difficulties to a happy marriage. I am far from despising the instinct which confines the art of story-telling within these limits, but think it, on the contrary, as wise as it is natural; yet at the same time everybody knows that there are many lives which only begin after that first fair chapter of youthful existence is completed; as also that there are many more which end, so far as there is any interest or vitality in them, before the other great conclusion which finishes all, so far as human vision goes. I will not say that the following Story has been written to carry out such a theory, which would not be true. It has grown out of much more natural and less premeditated causes; but that this theory is one which may justify the story; and as such I leave it in the reader's hands.

It is scarcely necessary to say that such a

theory forbids in the strongest manner any transcript from actual life, or *exploitation* of any individual story. Such an expedient, which I hold to be utterly unjustifiable in any case, would be at once dishonourable and foolish in this. So far as Art is concerned, I do not think that Truth, for her support, has any need of Fact.

M. O. W. O.

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CHAPTER I.

William Stanfield.

"I AM not one to waste words, nor to argue with them as shuts their ears; but if she was my girl, I wouldn't have her sitting there decked up, waiting for the young squire, not if you was to give me a hundred pounds; and so I tell you, master, for your own sake and hers both, though she never was more than civil to me."

"Decked up?" said William Stanfield. He lifted his mild large eyes upon his wife with a half-wondering tolerant calm. She was angry; she could not comprehend the real state of affairs. The blacksmith himself was slow to wrath and of a composed and steady nature. Even though his daughter was the apple of his eye, he could make excuses for her stepmother. He showed nothing but surprise in the lifting of those large soft brown eyes, which were calm, and

open, and unfathomable like those of the ox-eyed Juno. "Decked up?" he repeated the words with an inquiring glance.

"Well!" said the woman, with a little defiance, "she never is dressed what I call according to her rank in life; but to see her a-sitting up there in the parlour, with her nice collars and cuffs, a pair every day, and a bit o' nice needle-work, and her hair brushed till it's like a looking-glass, is more than enough for my patience;—just as a gentleman likes to find her, that is; if she was stirring about and helping me work, with a nice print apron and a tidy cap, it would be long enough before young Trevelyan would have looked the side of the road she was on."

"Meaning Agnes?" said the blacksmith, with a momentary lifting of his eyebrows and a smile. "Well, I don't think it's the collars and the cuffs exactly;—but never mind, Sally, I'll take care of the child. Young Trevelyan is a bit of a goose, between you and me. Agnes would not give twopence for him, or any like him. You don't know her yet, my dear."

"*Don't* I know her? and all her sort—sly puss!" cried the enraged Mrs. Stanfield; "mark my words, master, or you'll be took in and brought to shame. Agnes wouldn't mind the seriousest word you could say to her as much as she minds the light

looks of the young squire. Whatever he says, that's gospel; whatever he likes, she likes. It's not as I mean there's anything bad in the girl," continued the stepmother, seeing her husband's face darken, "it's nature, that's what it is —she's young and he's handsome, and has nicer manners than folks in her own class of life;—and then he's a gentleman and would make a lady of her——"

"Stop there—I might get angry before I knew it," said William Stanfield. "Stop there —I tell you, Sally, you know no more about my Agnes—— But never mind; you've done your duty in warning me—and don't you be afraid but I'll take care of my child."

"If it hadn't been for your fancy to keep her in your own hands—as if a man was more likely to understand a girl's vagaries than one as was a mother herself—I'd have spoken then and there," said the stepmother, "but I've always give in to you, master, as you know. You married me out of kindness, to give me an 'ome —and I'm not ungrateful to fly in your face, nor go against you. I'm only telling you just to mind, or, mark my words, you'll be took in and brought to shame."

"Brought to——? what word was that you said?" said the blacksmith, fixing upon her his

broad brown eyes. There was a momentary flash of indignation in those orbs, but no rage or violence—yet the voluble wife quailed before them. She grew silent at once, trembled, put her apron to her eyes—sobbed that she did not mean anything. Then the gleam which had for the instant thrown what almost seemed a red light over his face died out of William Stanfield's steady looks. He said quietly "I am busy," and went into the smithy, at the door of which they had been standing. His wife, with a demeanour much subdued and softened, withdrew also, crossing the yard of the forge towards a very clean outer stair, which led up to the house. The blacksmith of Windholm had a large business, being well known and much respected in the country. His house fronted to the High Street, close upon the green. The entrance to the forge was by a low archway, over which were the kitchen and parlour of his habitation; opening from the archway were some store-rooms, where the blacksmith kept sundry articles of his own and some of other people's;—so that his house was entirely above, and could be entered only by that open outer stair, clean as sand and scrubbing could make it, by which his wife now returned, cowed and put down, to mind her own business and see what Agnes might be about.

William Stanfield, the blacksmith of Windholm, was perhaps of all the men in the village the most respected and looked up to. He was well-to-do, which of course had some share in the general regard, and had come of people well-to-do from the third or fourth generation. The clergyman himself was not a greater authority in the parish. It was not that his sagacity was extraordinary, for he had been deceived now and then like other people, and had never concealed the fact;—nor that he was clever above his neighbours, for the public of Windholm was thoroughly aware that to get the "rights" of any business fairly into William Stanfield's head, required a degree of perseverance and patience difficult to attain; especially in regard to all kinds of chicanery, tricks, and meanness, nothing could exceed the obtusity of the blacksmith's intellect—and he nowise prided himself upon his powers of mind, or indeed upon any powers whatever, though he had a gratified half-consciousness of his own influence in the little community. His strength, however, lay, not in his talents but in his character. He was the sublimated honest man, *brave homme, galantuomo,* of Windholm. In him the transparency, the manful singlemindedness and pure honour of an ideal Englishman had attained realization. There was nobody within twenty

miles, good or bad, who would not have trusted house or land, widow or orphan, to William Stanfield with the most utter certainty of his truth to the trust. No squire or gentleman of the district came within a hundred miles of him in this respect. To doubt the blacksmith would have been the same as to doubt whether the pillars of earth stood fast, had any daring sceptic ventured on such a notion; but no such infidel had ever yet appeared at Windholm. He was slow in many things, this worthiest man of the village—above all slow to wrath, all but impervious to suspicion, slow to believe anything that it was shame or sorrow to hear of. The mild broad light of his eyes scarcely ever quickened out of that repose and tranquillity which made you think instinctively of the large, silent, unspeakable orbs in some dumb creature's face, and of the grand ox-eyes of the heathen-queen of heaven. His, too, were ox-eyes—large, soft, brown, impenetrable, full of a silent thoughtfulness, that never found expression except in that good life which was more eloquent, a thousand times, than any words. Had Paul and Barnabas been afloat on the world in our day, they would have been brought unanimously, by universal consent of the crowd, to William Stanfield's door, had they gone to

Windholm—whose house being worthy, they would not have departed from while they remained in the place—who would have washed their feet and spread their board, and listened with reverence and candour but slow conviction, saying little while the Divine message worked slowly in his heart. But he was a man of little book-learning, no reading to speak of, and altogether of an unintellectual development; though there were thoughts in him such as few have—delicacies which few people understood—and a certain poetic element in the worth which was so practical and real. Such was the blacksmith, the ideal man of Windholm.

Few people, however, quite approved of the way in which he had brought up his daughter. His wife had died so long ago, that Agnes had only her father to look after her education. Being the only child of a man well-to-do, nobody would have been surprised had Agnes Stanfield been sent to a boarding-school and made as much of a fine lady as is practicable to a tradesman's daughter in a village; but nothing of the kind was attempted with the girl. It was the imperceptible difference in the training and the evident difference in the result which puzzled and nettled the Windholm folks. Agnes had gone to Miss Thompson's school like

all the other girls, and had learned a little music and crochet-work, just like the rest, to make the writing and spelling palatable. She never had any finishing, any masters, or supernumerary lessons, such as had gone to the perfecting of Miss Rogers, the baker's daughter; and, like all her young contemporaries, she was superficial in what she did know, and had only a thin top-dressing of education laid upon the natural soil. But though exactly the same in all these respects, Agnes Stanfield, in herself, was totally different from the others, and not to be identified with them in any vulgar classification. Why? nobody could tell. The fact puzzled everybody in Windholm—puzzled a little, and vexed herself, poor child, who wondered at the little gulf, certainly not of her own making, between herself and her old schoolfellows. As nobody, however, could make out how this was, the natural and only resource remaining was to blame the blacksmith. Perhaps it endeared him the more to his admiring constituency that he was thus demonstrated not to be perfect. After a cordial confession of faith in the village sage, it was comforting to say, "But I don't approve all the same of the way he's brought up that girl o' his;" or, "He's not been judicious about Agnes, I must say; but then it couldn't be expected as

a man should know how to bring up a bit of a girl." "He ought to have took in a good step-mother to her as long as she didn't know no difference," said the women; "but la! when he did marry, to think as William Stanfield should make a mistake like that." For within the last two years it had become apparent that there were two weak points in the blacksmith's character—not only his treatment of his daughter, but his choice of a wife.

To be sure, it was easy to perceive with half an eye, as they stood together at the smithy door, she remonstrating, he listening, that the second Mrs. Stanfield was not like her husband. The first Mrs. Stanfield had been little more than a girl—sweet-tempered, blue-eyed, a pretty, modest creature—one of the flowers of the village, of whom nobody knew anything more than that she was pretty to look at and sweet to listen to, when the young broken-hearted husband laid her in her grave. Twenty years the blacksmith had lived solitary, without, so far as the village knew, looking twice at any woman all the time. What was it that roused him out of the tranquillity of his life? If it had been in the days of witchcraft, of love philters and potions, the village would have decided the matter more easily. Agnes was nearly twenty, her father's constant companion—and no mother in Belgravia could be more

careful of her daughter's associates than was the blacksmith of Windholm that nobody unmeet should approach his woman-child. What tempted him then, in the composure of his maturer years, to bring that red-haired, high-coloured, impatient vagrant of a woman into the house which hitherto had been a model of quiet domestic management? Nobody could tell. It was the only mystery in William Stanfield's life. She would have been a scold and a termagant in any house but his; and even in his house she was a vehement, noisy, troublesome presence, always in motion, always in *com*motion, startling all the old usages of the place. She was a widow, and had children of her own—two rough boys, whom she carried with her to the blacksmith's, to aggravate all her other shortcomings, and a daughter whom nobody had seen, who was at school, as Mrs. Stanfield boasted incessantly. How William Stanfield could have taken such a person to be his daughter's companion and governor, to disturb and revolutionize his house, to introduce new elements of noise and discord hitherto unknown, to disturb the very air with hasty movements and loud speech, was totally incomprehensible to the surrounding world. From the clergy-women of Windholm down to the charwomen, the question was discussed with

but one conclusion. "The men are all fools, my dear, where women are concerned," said the wife of the rector to the wife of the curate; and so said, in different and perhaps more piquant phraseology, Mrs. Mumford, the laundress on the green, to her assistant Betsy. Perhaps the conclusions of the male portion of the community were not much different. At all events, it was totally unexplainable in any other view. The blacksmith's heart or his senses must have been captivated somehow, and behold, even in the wise man of the village, the lamentable result.

How it came about that this piece of strange folly remained totally without effect upon the popular mind, which still believed in William Stanfield all the same, it would be difficult to explain. Perhaps, because, in the very doing of this great mistake, and through all its consequences, he himself continued the same, unwise in one practical point, but still wiser in goodness, in temperance, in the tranquillity of his blameless life, than any man near. After he had made this foolish marriage, the world, instead of scoffing, condoned the offence, and perhaps was all the more affectionate from perceiving that he was still but a man like others. Was he now, perhaps, on the verge of something more foolish still, about which even his strangely-chosen wife could enlighten him?

There were certainly whispers in the village to that effect, which had reached Mrs. Stanfield's ears; but the blacksmith himself, as has been already said, was slow—slow to suspect evil—very slow to imagine that anybody meant to wrong himself, or that anything could possibly occur to shake his daughter from the visionary pedestal on which his love had placed her. Now that the thought had been suggested to him, he pondered it in his mind, with a smile sometimes, semetimes with a certain heaviness. Young Trevelyan had certainly been a frequent visitor. He was a goose, the blacksmith thought to himself, and smiled a gradual smile which made sunshine on his face, and even showed through his drooping eyelashes in the lighting up of the eyes beneath. But then Agnes was young—and William Stanfield had once been young and in love according to nature, though he was now elderly, and had just made a marriage of compassion. What if, perhaps, love, which makes men do so many follies, might blind the eyes of an innocent girl to the fact that a handsome young man was a goose, however apparent it might be to others? Such things had been done before, as everybody knew. The blacksmith thought over the subject until the fires in the smithy paled, and the workmen, of whom he had three, began to pull on their grimy jackets

to go home. Then the master sent the 'prentice-boy, Oliver, upstairs with a message, and making hasty ablutions, put on his own coat and sallied forth in the sunsetting. It was a very unusual step for William Stanfield. Oliver's message caused an unexplainable commotion upstairs, for it was only when something more than ordinary had happened that the blacksmith, instead of coming up to tea as usual, closed up the forge when the workmen left, and went out himself for a walk.

CHAPTER II.

The Stepmother.

MRS. STANFIELD drew a long breath of satisfaction as she went in at her own door. She had been only about a year in possession of all these good things, and her heart had not yet got so habituated to them as to forget a throb of pride, sometimes a sentiment of thankfulness, when she closed her own honest door, and stood the bearer of an honourable name, one of the chief matrons of the village, within those walls which had taken her in out of the uncertainty of an almost vagrant life. All this comfort, honour, and wealth was still sufficiently new to her to suggest a renewed satisfaction to her mind every time she entered. The door opened upon a passage, carpeted down the middle with a long strip of bright-coloured carpet, at the end of which was the closed door of the parlour. On the left hand in the corner ascended the stair which led to the bed-

chambers, and on the right hand was a little square space lighted with a window—a curious bright recess off the passage—a kind of little porter's lodge, from which the outer stair and everybody who approached the house could be inspected;—though, indeed, the wall was so thin, and the window so close upon that outside staircase, that it would have been almost impossible to carry on any such espials without attracting the observation of the person without. Nothing could go on in the yard below without being perfectly commanded by this window. If it chanced to be open, nothing could even be said without being heard, if anybody chose to listen; and as the second Mrs. Stanfield was jealous and curious, as became a woman suddenly raised to an enviable elevation, about what people said of her, and entertained an idea (not so far wrong at one time) that everybody was talking about her, this point of observation was a very favourite one; and there she sat often in the cold, with the window up a little, and herself only partially apparent behind the white blind, listening to a world of trivial remarks about horses and iron, by way of picking up the gossip which she knew very well was rife about her all over Windholm. The only time, indeed, in which she was ever known to be quiet was when seated watchful, but uncomfortable, in this

niche, with some pretence at work in her hand. She made little of it, it is true, for the people in the yard were mostly men, and busy with their own business; but the exciting possibility of hearing herself discussed kept her alert, and sometimes she was rewarded by a bitter word or two, enough to reanimate the lawless spirit which smouldered for lack of fuel, almost subdued by the quiet of this orderly house.

She did not go in directly to Agnes, as she had intended, nor even to the comfortable, bright, well-ordered kitchen, of which she was even more proud than the parlour. She went upstairs to make herself tidy, as she said, after having been blown about a little by the frolicsome March wind. She was a little more than forty, a handsome buxom woman. Had she been in a higher rank, and more carefully preserved, her complexion would have been the theme of unlimited admiration; but in this latitude the brilliant roses on her cheeks were known, and not inappropriately, as a high colour, and regarded with modified applauses. She was highly coloured throughout, with a full-blown bloom not unsuitable to her years. Her hair was of the warmest tinge of brown, though only her enemies called it red; and over her throat and her arms, her chin and forehead, and ears and elbows, the once pearly dazzling white was all

creamed over with a faint flush. It certainly was a beautiful colour—but there was a little too much of it. It gave a certain sensuous aspect to her full form and plump arms, off which she was fond of pushing her sleeves, up and down, when she had nothing else to do. Altogether rather a carnal sort of woman, all made of flesh and blood; not a touch of white had yet softened the rich glory of her abundant hair, and time had not ironed out or filled up the roseleaf dimples about her. She stood, in a kind of fiery overblown beauty before the mirror—a creature who had stormed through her life, snatching every pleasure within reach, making small account of any restraint, utterly without self-control, or any attempt at it, or even perception that it was desirable. Her eyes were hazel, with a red gleam in them, which brought all the softer red in her to a culmination. Soft blue eyes would have made her almost beautiful; but the fiery hazel carried out the character, while they spoiled the perfection of her face. The warm, round, pleasure-loving, self-indulgent form took an aspect of heat and excitement from those eyes—they made her look dangerous in her vociferous, middle-aged beauty. This was the appearance she presented as she stood before the looking-glass, putting up her hair and arranging her cap.

How had that room, in which so many tranquil hours and speechless thoughts had passed over William Stanfield, come to belong to this wild flushed creature, with all her animal beauty and fierce impulses, who did not know what thoughts were? Heaven knows! This was exactly the question which the entire population of Windholm, laying its many heads together, could not solve. Certain it was that there she stood, indisputable mistress—a fair, round, roseate fact, secure in her rights, and triumphant. That great wardrobe was hers, with all its wings and shelves—those shelves from which she had herself removed some simple muslin gowns, all strewn with bits of lavender, which were all William Stanfield had to remind him of the girl-wife whom he had left behind so far away in his youth. The new wife cleared them all away to Agnes's room, and her husband did not blame her; she had a right. And hers, too, were the piles of fragrant linen inside, of which she had taken possession with a sense of wealth unknown to all her life before, though she had spent money enough in her day. She stood secure and triumphant there in her own chamber, her surprise at the achievement growing less, but her exultation still in its height. Even now she paused to look admiringly round at all the well-polished substantial furni-

ture, and arranged her cap in the great mirror with an additional complacence to feel that this, as well as the glowing face she saw in it, was her very own.

What the past was into which this lawless creature looked back, in her own heart and memory, nobody knew; and nobody knew so little as the humble *preux chevalier*, who had taken what seemed her poverty, and helplessness, and destitution into this bosom of plenty. He could no more have fathomed her thoughts or guessed at her recollections than—she could have guessed at or fathomed his. They occupied this room and this house together, dreamed and slumbered side by side, breathed the same air, ate the same food, and were about as far apart from each other all the time as heaven is from hell. Not quite as heaven from hell; she was an undisciplined being, obeying the wild impulses of her own nature rather than any law human or divine, but there was no bottomless pit nor sulphureous blazes as yet in her soul, if she had a soul. But they were as far apart as two human creatures totally different—the one all harmony, the other all discord, could be; and yet they were joint proprietors of this house and this room. The great wardrobe contained still in one of its divisions the black widow's dress and close bonnet in

which two years ago, when she first came to Windholm, she had endeavoured to soften down and subdue her exuberant flesh and blood. She was Mrs. Smith then, a convenient name, and was destitute and half-starving, she and her boys, for whom she had a wild kind of tigress fondness. She had described herself as a sailor's widow, and made violent attempts to get employment, she did not mind what, to maintain the children, who immediately became the pests of Windholm. For a time she did work, vehemently, in a storm of zeal and haste, but soon gave in, got discouraged, and gave herself up to starvation with passionate outcries. And it was then that William Stanfield, of all men in the world, came to the rescue, married her by some miracle, sent off her lawless boys to sea, and placed her mistress in this serene and plentiful house. That was her entire history, so far as it was known in the village. She was not communicative about the previous chapters; and the late Smith held no place in his widow's reminiscences. The only thing she did speak of belonging to her past existence, except vague accounts of what she herself had done and "come through," was her daughter, who was at a boarding-school in the south of England, kept there by her father's friends. This girl, who had never been seen in Windholm,

was Mrs. Stanfield's grand *corps de reserve*. She was produced on all occasions when a greater effect than ordinary was desirable; she was getting the best of educations from her father's friends. Such was the only link of connexion apparent between the blacksmith's wife in her new position, and the old stormy existence, of which the Windholm folks were ready to form the wildest conjectures, without power to prove any of them true.

"She'll come to harm, that's what will happen," said Mrs. Stanfield to herself, as she stood before the glass—"and if she does—other folks has been as bad—it's no concern of mine. The master would mind me more if he wasn't so took up about that chit of a girl. Mercy me! I wasn't speaking out loud, was I? To think as it should be young Roger! I hope to goodness as his father isn't coming here; he'd take to following his son, and then, wouldn't there be squalls agoing? He's fond of me, is the master," mused the blacksmith's wife, giving the finishing touch to her cap. She paused now in her thoughts, and held her head a little on one side and contemplated her own face with a smile. Perhaps she thought it was no wonder the master was fond of her, much as the world of Windholm marvelled over that fact. As for the heroine

herself, she appreciated more than anybody else the charm of her own roseate full-blooded comeliness. Though she had an awe of the master which she never could explain to herself, it exhilarated her to think of exciting his jealousy and bringing him down from his pedestal of goodness. Such fancies vanished from her mind in his presence. But when she was alone, the natural produce of the soil appeared again. Then, having finished her toilet, she went downstairs, pausing as she passed in the recess by the door to glance out with her usual curiosity. It was just six o'clock, and the red light of sunset was streaming into the yard in long level rays through the archway. The men were leaving, pulling on their jackets, and behind them she could see the master in his blue coat issuing out of the smithy door. With a little tremor and surprise she saw him pass the stair and follow his workmen out into the street. It disturbed her vaguely, though she did not understand the full significance of the fact, that the master, instead of coming in to tea, had gone out for a walk.

CHAPTER III.

Agnes.

MRS. STANFIELD went first to the kitchen, which was one of the two rooms facing to the front over the archway. The sun streamed in here as it had done in the yard, but with a fuller flood. She stopped there for some time, talking to Martha, who was nearly as full and as ruddy as her mistress, but much milder and more dutiful of nature. While the stepmother is there in that more congenial atmosphere, let us open the door at the end of the passage, which was still closed when Mrs. Stanfield passed it on her way to the kitchen, and see, as the blacksmith's wife had not yet taken the trouble to ascertain, what Agnes was about.

Agnes was sitting at one of the windows, defended from the sunshine by the Venetian blinds, which let in the light only in bars upon her drooping head. She was working, as became

her father's daughter—not at fancy-work in any of its branches, but at ordinary stitching of a useful kind, to serve the common necessities of the house. There was nothing particularly refined or graceful in the room, which was a good-sized square apartment, with ordinary homely mahogany furniture, and curtains at the windows, and a red-and-blue cover on the table. The blinds were down because of the sun, so that it was only in peeps between the Venetian bars that the outer world was visible—to wit, the village green lying red and bright in the level sunshine, which threw up the black outline of the great house opposite and its cedars against the red sky in the west. But, indeed, the outside world had no special charm just then for the blacksmith's daughter. She was pursuing her work without raising her head, having enough to do at the moment in her heart without taking note of anything external. After all, to the limited extent of her vision, it was the stepmother who was right. If the young squire was indeed a goose, Agnes knew no more of it than if she had herself been as stupid as any heavy milkmaid; less, indeed, for at least the milkmaid might have seen him with real eyes where he sat beside her, leaning forward, with one red line marking his forehead and crossing the thin, well-brushed curls of his light hair; whereas

Agnes saw, not Roger Trevelyan, but an impossible paladin of romance, the noblest and truest that ever swore fealty to happy maiden. She did not use such words, certainly, even in her heart, yet that was how the matter appeared to those eyes which she bent over her work. They had said nothing to each other as yet, nor broken in any way the charmed silence of their youth, and they were both in a condition of exquisite, unconfessed, nameless happiness, far more delicate and rare than any understood or acknowledged bliss. So far the stepmother was right enough; but beyond that her insight did not go. The ghost she saw behind had no existence. Harm of any kind was not in the youth's thoughts any more than in the visionary heart of the girl. Roger Trevelyan, glad to find the blacksmith's strange wife out of the way, and not sorry that the village sage himself delayed his coming, had been reading to Agnes out of a book which he had offered to lend her. In case there might have been any chance of love-making, had the two been left to frame conversation for each other, what so safe as a book to fill up with its impersonal presence the gap between them? So Roger read, not without a pleasant sense of superiority, and consciousness that he must be opening new worlds to William Stanfield's

daughter; and, as was natural, the book he had chosen was poetry; and the poem he was reading was that loveliest of all ballads, in which the poet woos and wins his Genevieve. Now, young Trevelyan was fresh from Oxford, accustomed to read verses and to hear them criticized. He knew exactly what ought to be said about that matchless strain, and the music of it pleased his ear, and he was aware that it held a high rank in poetry—besides all which a little personal illumination had fallen on it just then, he scarcely knew how, and sent a tingle and thrill through him as he read—

> "All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
> Whatever stirs this mortal frame."

But the words, which were a pleasant song to the reader, floated in a kind of ecstasy over Agnes. Though she did not look up, her hands stayed upon her work, her breath upon her lips to listen. They bore her up upon celestial wings, those wonderful words. She could scarcely tell where she was, or what it was that rapt her thus out of herself. The poetry passed lightly over the young Oxford man, even though he was in love, having no real relations with him, but it swept into the soul of the listening girl, and transformed her to her own dazzled consciousness. She could not utter a word when he ceased.

She sat quite still, with the celestial fumes of the poetry in her brain, overwhelmed with a strange confusion. When he began to talk she felt herself come down slowly into the real world, from which she had been transported and carried away; and thus was sitting somewhat giddy and faint, working with trembling fingers, her entire frame still vibrating to the past music. And the young squire lingered, as Mrs. Stanfield had anticipated, and evidently did not feel himself at all out of his element in the tidy parlour of the blacksmith's house.

It was not a proper place for the young squire—that was undeniable, to start with. On the other side of the village, standing out black against the ruddy western sky, was the Cedars, where there were three young ladies, all perfectly able to meet young Trevelyan on his own ground, and to read poetry with him, or engage in any other dangerous pleasant pastime; young ladies not exactly of his own rank, perhaps—without either pedigree or wealth enough to please the Trevelyans—but still ladies, unconscious of the existence of the blacksmith's daughter. He had played croquet with them on their pleasant lawn, and had even gone with the prettiest to see the cedar-trees in the moonlight, when he first arrived at the desolate old Hall, where Sir Roger

had despatched him to look after the steward's accounts, and inquire into the longevity of the tenants. Many people thought the Cedars the pleasantest house in Windholm, and envied the young squire his cordial welcome there; but after the first eventful day, on which he sauntered yawning from the gate and crossed over to the forge, in mere idleness, to inquire after the shoeing of his favourite horse, young Roger's thoughts had gone in a direction entirely contrary to the Cedars. That was at least two months before the beginning of this history. First of all, he went to see William Stanfield, who, indeed, exercised a certain fascination over everybody who approached him; then, as fate would have it, the young man had somehow strayed up the outer stair into the parlour; then, he would have been in that parlour for ever, had it been practicable. Some excuse, carefully manufactured yet wonderfully genuine—for it is the privilege of youth to believe in its own fictions, and to persuade the world of their authenticity—led his steps thither almost every day. The blacksmith, who was used to be sought, received him simply without thinking much about the matter; and so all the village got once more a-talking, and young Trevelyan sat in the parlour over the archway, reading how Genevieve was wooed and won, to a village girl.

She got up softly when she came to herself—a little afraid of herself, afraid of him and of the world which seemed to be opening full of new significance around her. "My father will soon come in to tea," said the blacksmith's daughter, putting down her needlework, and proceeding, as a means of escape from the crisis, to set on the table the china teacups from the cupboard in the corner. Tea, set out upon a homely daylight table in the character of a prosaic meal, is perhaps of all meals the most prosaic. Such an idea, however, never crossed the mind of Agnes. She went away from the window where the red sunshine came in low and level through the blind, treading with light feet over what seemed to be a heap of ruddy gold on the carpet, and went about her simple business with no other consciousness than that it was her business, and with still the thrill and cadence of the poetry, and of something still more urgent than the poetry, hanging about her like vibrations of music. She was of a light low figure, perfectly dressed—that is, dressed just as was suitable for the blacksmith's daughter. Her gown was dark grey, of a fine and light woollen fabric, taking folds which a painter would have loved; and her little collar and cuffs were spotless and dazzling in their simplicity. Her step keeping

a kind of visionary time to that music which enveloped her still, had all the grace of unconsciousness and preoccupation. Her small head drooped upon the delicate throat as if all that mass of hair overweighed it; hair matchless in Windholm, black without a tinge of any invading colour, folded in magnificent braids round the little head, which recovered size without losing delicacy by means of that investiture. She had no colour except when she was moved, as at this moment; when it went and came, a blush too sweet and faint to be kept steady, or identified as complexion. Last of all, her eyes, which young Trevelyan found it so difficult to see, but which, when he did see them, opened up to that careless young soul two wonderful avenues into the unspeakable and unrevealed; they were blue of the deepest violet colour, totally unlike her father's, yet taking from his a certain breadth of pathetic simplicity which it would be hard to describe—sweet serious eyes, which were sad without meaning it, without knowing why. This was the handmaid who moved about in her beauty before the young squire, setting on the table the many-coloured teacups. He could not have told whether she was the blacksmith's daughter of Windholm or an enchanted princess—either or both, what did

it matter? It was she—and there was not, so far as young Roger was concerned, though he scarcely knew it, any other in the world.

"Your father is late to-night," said the young squire, getting up from his chair, looking out through the Venetian blinds, finally looking at his watch in the vague embarrassment of the pause, which seemed as if it should have culminated into something, and which he regarded with a certain half terror and surprise, now that it had passed away. Was it a lingering of nature that detained the youth and the maiden upon the verge, and kept them still afloat in that sweetest uncertainty? They had missed the moment just then, and had agreed in the little panic which prompted both to sudden motion, to sudden descent out of those dangerous heights. Thus it was that they fell on the most prosaic subjects, feeling half consciously, how near they had been to one subject which would have driven time and place, and fathers and mundane necessities, altogether out of their heads.

"Yes."—Agnes made a little pause as she arranged the cups. "He sometimes stays longer than the men. Did you ever know anybody like my father?" she continued softly. There was a certain protection almost like his presence in speaking of him.

"No," said Roger, and then the young man hesitated a little; "if he had been educated," said the Oxford scholar, who knew no better, "he would have been a very remarkable man."

Agnes was in no mood to contradict or even to differ from the young squire, but in her heart she objected unconsciously to the idea of any possible improvement in her father. "I suppose education makes a great difference," she said, rather wistfully; "but he thinks a great deal, though he does not read much—is not that the best of all?"

"Nobody thinks now-a-days," said Roger, with that flippancy which Agnes did not understand—"there is nothing but talk in the world. I daresay, if *you* were to hear the conversation that goes on in—in society, you know—it would sound to you as if people meant it; but it's all sound and fury, signifying nothing; words—bare words; nobody ever thinks now-a-days—at least, in the world."

"Nor mean what they say?" said Agnes with unconscious satire; "but perhaps you are too hard upon people who may not—be equal to you."

"Oh, Agnes! Well, it is a very complimentary delusion, and I ought to keep you up in it," cried

the young squire, with a laugh of natural honesty, "but I am sorry to say people in general have not so high an opinion of me. Why, I was as near plucked as possible—though I dare say you don't understand what that is;" and Roger broke off abruptly, thinking, perhaps, he had been too candid, and that there was no need to have made that last confession. The only result it had, however, was a very agreeable one. It made Agnes raise to him those blue deep serious eyes, which took nothing lightly, and which at the present moment were full of mysterious sympathy and wonder. She did not in the least know what being plucked meant. She understood it only as some wrong the wicked world, most probably in envy, had tried to do him, and the blue wondering sorrowful depths quickened with a little flash of indignation, until they dropped again, in that consciousness of being gazed into, which was so new and overpowering to Agnes. She withdrew hurriedly from his gaze, and this time went to the door to look for Mrs. Stanfield, who was just then questioning Oliver in the passage. "Gone out for a walk! not come to his tea!" said the blacksmith's wife; "when does the master mean to come in, I wonder? And just when I wanted my tea particular. You run and tell him we're waiting, Nolly, and I've got a bit of a headache."

All which words Roger Trevelyan heard as he stood by the window looking out through the Venetian blinds. The three young ladies at the Cedars were just then crossing the green, all in scarlet petticoats, festooned dresses, and hats of the last fashion. They were going in to dress for dinner, and the sight of them recalled the young squire, standing in the blacksmith's parlour with "the tea-things" upon the table, to some passing thoughts of the region of life to which he himself belonged. Very passing thoughts, for Agnes came in again, like a nun in her Carmelite grey, with those dazzling white cuffs round her slender little hands, and drawing up the blind from the farther window, sat down to her work once more. She had left the door open, too, that door which young Trevelyan never failed to close when he could manage it, shutting out the loud stepmother and the commonplace house. These were all little harmless precautions on the part of Agnes against the confidential intercourse which in her heart she began to shrink from and grow afraid of, delightful as it was. But to see her sitting there at the window, exposed to the gaze of the people outside, if there had been anybody to gaze, and with the open door opposite, diluting this charmed atmosphere with common air and

the horrible presence of Mrs. Stanfield, was too much for the young squire. He went to the window she was seated at, and leaned against it, and said in an abstracted tone, "I must go away." "Must you?" said Agnes without looking up, but with a quickening throb of her heart. "I suppose so," said Roger; "you are tired of me—you take up your work, you throw the door open, you invite other people to come in. It is time I should go away."

Agnes did not make any answer. Usually the blacksmith himself had come in and was one of the party when young Trevelyan took his leave. They had never up to this time come to the suggestive moment of parting, by themselves. The young squire did not move after he had spoken, but stood leaning against the edge of the window-shutter, gazing down upon her—gazing intently, so that she felt her forehead scorching and glowing under the fire of his eyes. She kept on sewing, making spasmodic uncertain stitches in her bewilderment, but keeping very hard at it, to support herself; and he stood with a kind of tender rage looking down upon her. "You don't care whether I go or stay," said the young man, forgetting himself. "When I go away, it is to wander about all night, thinking of you, or to sit by myself in that wretched old Hall, dreaming about you;—and

you keep your eyes fixed upon that bit of rag and never once look at me," cried the young lover, divided between the impulse of darting out in a pet away from her, and of throwing himself down at her feet.

Agnes lifted a startled look to him out of those alarmed blue eyes—a look which he had scarcely time to see ere it was gone. But rapid as it was, he did not know how to answer its sweetness, its sadness, its silent reproach, and the warning it seemed to convey. He was silent in spite of himself. There was an unspeakable appeal to his forbearance in that glance. It seemed to say, "Stop! don't say anything that will make me flee from you." Roger was checked in the petulance of his young passion. He restrained himself for her sake; he could not understand the sudden curb, which was sweet, yet hard to bear, against which he fretted himself, yet which raised his love and admiration to the point of enthusiasm. He was silent till he heard Mrs. Stanfield's step. It was impossible just then to endure her presence.

"Yes, I must go," said Roger. "You always shake hands with me, Agnes. I am going—that is to say, as much of me as can go," added the young man, as he held fast for an instant the little coy hand. Next moment Mrs. Stanfield

was in the room. "I have been waiting for the master," said young Trevelyan, bursting out into a little natural impertinence; "but as he is not coming, I must go. Perhaps I shall meet him in the road. Shall I say you have a headache, and want your tea, Mrs. Stanfield? When he hears that, he will certainly come home."

"Ay do, please, sir," said the blacksmith's wife; "though how you should know as I've got the headache, Mr. Trevelyan——But won't you stay till the master comes? You do most nights. He might have something as he wanted to say."

"Not to-night," said Roger, with consciousness in his looks; and he went away without any further farewells. As for Agnes, she went on sewing, feeling as if the sun had gone down all at once. The air seemed to rustle and stir in that vacant place where he had stood a minute before. His words had confused her, as was natural, and she was conscious of having stopped him—begged him to stop—though she could not account for the impulse which had moved her. She would have given the world to get free, to run up to her own room and think it over, and perhaps subdue her heart into its ordinary pulsations; but Mrs. Stanfield was more than usually talkative that night.

"You are a pretty Miss to have everybody

a-thinking and a-talking of you," said the stepmother. "Here's your father, poor man, gone out for a walk, for nothing, you take my word, but to think it over and see what's best to be done. He's been a-saying something particular to you to-night?"

"Who?" said Agnes, with faltering lips.

"Don't tell me! I know things when I see 'em. He's been a-saying something out of the common. I don't ask you to make a friend o' me, for I don't think as you ever liked me, Agnes Stanfield," said the blacksmith's wife; "but I know how such things go on—ay, a deal better than your father; and good can't come of it, child," added the woman, with a little natural feeling. "I could tell you tales would wring your heart; and I can't a-bear to see another go the same road—no, not if it was to be twenty times for my benefit. You'll not listen to him no more, Agnes Stanfield, if you'll be guided by me."

Agnes grew very pale; her strange upbringing had matured in her a germ of visionary pride, very natural in her circumstances, and it was true that she did not like the stepmother, against whom all the refinement of her nature revolted. She answered, lifting her head out of its habitual droop, with a lighting up of her serious eyes, and

momentary dilation of her delicate nostril. "No one has ever said anything to me which I ought not to listen to," said Agnes. She spoke like one who ends a controversy, and does not mean to hear any more about it. All Mrs. Stanfield's wealth of words could have come to nothing against that gentle immovable rock of resolution; and so her stepmother had already found out by experiment. So she left the girl undisturbed at her sewing, and went out to the causeway, with the ribbons of her cap waving in the wind, to look for her husband. Agnes, when she was left alone, let her work drop on her knees, and bowed her head upon her hand, and abandoned herself—to dreams? Scarcely to dreams. The words that had been spoken within the previous hour took possession of the silence like so many fairies, and wove mystic dances round her: "All thoughts, all passions, all delights." Ah! what was that "mystic flame" which everything thus went to feed?

CHAPTER IV.

The Blacksmith's Walk.

HE went away from the village over the common, where the gorse bushes were slowly bursting into flower. There was nothing remarkable in the scenery. Some red-tiled cottages dropt on one side, with a line of brown road in front of them, bordered by some tall elms, and terminating in the garden-gates and genteel retirement of one of the great houses of Windholm; and broken only by the broad high-road which led to London and the world; an irregular stretch of common, spreading away into the west, into the great belt of crimson-golden sky, which enclosed the flat country. That was all; except the minor details of green grass and yellow gorse, and the broad level line of sunshine which poured across the landscape, casting long shadows of every obstacle it encountered upon the soft greensward, which never looks so sweet

under any other light. There were some lads playing cricket in the corner of the common, but beyond that everything was very still. The great people were preparing for dinner, the small people were having tea, as William Stanfield ought to have been doing at this moment. It was an hour of quiet throughout Windholm. The blacksmith saw scarcely anybody to speak of, except in the distance the figure of a lady, upon a tall horse, doubly tall and very dark and ominous against the illuminated sky. By reason of his occupation, he knew pretty well all the female equestrians of the district, but he did not recognise this tall figure upon the tall horse, and even amid the preoccupation of his own thoughts wondered rather who she could be. She was going along slowly at a walking pace, against the sunshine, which threw a broken gigantic shadow of her form over the turf, and did the same by her groom, who followed slowly after at the same pace, leading another horse. They passed on slowly out of sight as the blacksmith crossed the common, following their movements with his eyes, and disappeared in the light at the next turning, which led to the Hall gates. Before they went out of sight, the lady had paused to look round, as if for the absent rider of the led horse, which was a white one,

and made its own special mark in the landscape—and even while he discussed his own affairs, William Stanfield, with the rapid curiosity of a villager, could not but pause to ask himself who this could be.

However, his own affairs were urgent. The wind blew soft over the common, hushed out of its March wildness into an ideal air of spring, and bearing upon it the faint honeyed breath of the gorse and odour of the fresh earth and growing grass. Stanfield wound his way up and down through the little knolls and hollows, with the level sun shining in his eyes whenever he raised them, and waking up a broad placid brightness in those meditative orbs. His broad breast expanded to the sweet air and peaceful evening. He had little to say about the landscape and its beauties, and, indeed, its beauties were few; but the atmosphere entered into and possessed him, laying its open secret lovingly apparent to the eyes which could see. Was it likely that under such circumstances he could judge his child by the gossips' stories of the village? A smile came upon his lip as he mused. His pretty young wife had died so young and so long ago, that though she was his tenderest recollection she was scarcely his ideal. He had found that in his child. All the poetry in William Stan-

field's life was associated with Agnes; her sweet gravity, her young thoughtfulness, the delicate purity of atmosphere about the girl for whom he was conscious education had done so little, without being at all aware how much a merciful abstinence from education and his own example and society had done—made her a kind of tender child-goddess to her father. What was to be her fate he had not speculated. A mother might have done so, but the father was content to leave her as she was, and could not think that youth, that tender bloom, need ever fade. To be always young, always delicate, virginal, a thing apart, seemed the natural conclusion in respect to Agnes; the common fate, marriage and motherhood, a lover, a wedding, a new household, with prosaic necessities and everyday wants, had never occurred to her father in connexion with her. He rather shrank from the thought now and eluded it. It was not only that he thought, as a doting father might, nobody good enough for his beautiful child—but that the idea itself was profane, a kind of desecration. And then young Trevelyan? The slow smile grew on William Stanfield's face. That Agnes could think twice of a shallow youth like their visitor was inconceivable to him. He forgot that she was only a girl, and knew nothing

of men. He forgot the celestial glamour of youth which was still in her eyes. She was not a village girl, but one of the sacred band of saints and angels to her father. He put away the thought from him, with something which in another man might have been haughtiness. It stopped short of haughtiness with him, not because he was the village blacksmith, but because his nature was too broad and genial for any such superficial sentiment. And then having quite cleared his Agnes in his mind from any possible share in such a frivolous fancy, William Stanfield had leisure to consider the practical question which he had come out here to discuss with himself in the face of nature, and in the silence of the fields.

This was, whether he ought to dismiss from his house the young visitor whom he believed in his heart to be so totally harmless; whether he should so far yield to common prejudices as to send away a young man who never could be regarded as a possible husband for Agnes, out of her way? Perhaps some instinct in his own mind consented to the suggestion; but at the bottom he was a proud man, though nobody knew it; and his hospitality, his generous mind, his pride for his child, alike rebelled against the thought. Had he been more intellectual than he was, he might have

respected Roger Trevelyan's education, and given him credit for attainments so superior to his own. But William Stanfield was not intellectual; he judged his young acquaintance by a different standard, by his character, by the size and stature of his spirit; and finding nothing imposing there, it was with a certain mild toleration and good-humoured half-contempt that he regarded the young squire. Why should he send him away? What harm could the lad do? To deny him admission was to confess that the youth's influence counted for something, which was more than all the blacksmith's magnanimity could induce him to acknowledge. And the result would, most probably, have been in young Roger's favour, but for an encounter which turned the scales entirely against him, and, so far as Stanfield was concerned, sealed his fate.

The blacksmith had turned his face homeward as he approached the end of his deliberations, and when he raised his eyes he saw a man approaching whom he instinctively identified as the absent rider of the white horse, for whom the lady and the groom had each, in their turn, paused to look before turning up the lane. The new comer was evidently a stranger, not very sure of the way, and curious about the place and the inhabitants, to judge from the steadiness with which he examined

into Stanfield's personal appearance, as they approached each other. He was not a very imposing figure in himself, being an under-sized, doubtful-looking personage, with his eye-glass screwed tightly into his eye, and visible indications of an excitable temper in his countenance. The primitive blacksmith compassionately set down to "ill-breeding" the stare with which the stranger regarded him, and gazed in his turn with eyes that required no glass, and with a little expectation in his mind, which he would have found it difficult to explain even to himself. When the stranger came to a full stop just before they met, the blacksmith stopped, too, by instinct; and the two stood for a moment in silence, with that strange certainty of having something to do with each other, which gives to enmity and anger a power of identification as powerful as that of love.

The stranger was the first to speak. "Are you the blacksmith of Windholm?" he asked, in peremptory tones. "I have been to your house to look for you. Are you—Stanmore, Stanton—I forget the name?"

"William Stanfield, at your service," said the blacksmith, with his usual composure of speech.

"You don't recollect me, I suppose," said the little man, "though you must have seen me years

ago. I am Sir Roger Trevelyan. When you hear my name, I daresay you will understand what I want with you," he continued, with a sniff of rising wrath. He was not a man of dignified demeanour, and the blacksmith was not moved to any special sensation of awe or fright by his name.

Stanfield took off his hat with natural courtesy in acknowledgment of the self-introduction; but he put it on again, and confronted the baronet calmly, without much feeling of any kind. "I know Sir Roger Trevelyan's name, as stands to reason," he said, with a smile, "but I don't know, except it is in the way of my trade, what the lord of the manor can want with the blacksmith. Anyhow, I am at Sir Roger's commands."

It was this speech that occasioned the baronet's first loss of temper. He turned his head away for a moment, and swore a few oaths for the relief of his mind under his breath; for, though Sir Roger was far from being a wise man, he perceived that his antagonist had him at an advantage in the matter of temper, and did what he could at the beginning to restrain himself.

"You'll know what I mean, presently," he said. "I have heard all about your hospitalities and your pretensions, Mr. Blacksmith. You

may be twenty times the village oracle, for anything I care; but I have come to put a stop to your confounded impudence," cried Sir Roger, breaking his feeble tether. "It is no use putting on an air of innocence to me; I know exactly what you've been about. You and your daughter, a low-bred, artful——"

"Stop there!" cried the blacksmith. "If all's true that's said, you are not the man to meddle with a woman's name. Say what you've got to say to me, and I'll listen in peace; but there's no man on earth, if he were a king, that shall speak of her disrespectful," said the indignant father, with a sudden flush of colour. "You are a stranger, and don't know what you're talking about," he added a moment after, regaining command of himself, and looking down with compassionate dignity upon the excited little man before him. "What is it you've got to say?"

"This sort of thing won't impose upon me," cried Sir Roger; "it's all very well for your audience in the village. I tell you I know what you've been doing, and I've come here to put a stop to it. You have inveigled my fool of a son into your house, and let him play love and courtship to your daughter. I shouldn't mind letting him have his swing," said the little

man, with an odious look, for which, had he but known it, he was as nearly being knocked down as ever man was. "Other young men have done as much before him; but if you think I will stand by and see Roger inveigled into a low marriage——"

"Stop there!" said Stanfield again; "passion is a thing that comes on a man sudden, and I wouldn't undertake to be wiser than my neighbours. Stop there, Sir Roger. I'm a deal stronger than you are, and I might do you some harm before I knew."

"You threaten me!" said the baronet, in a rage—"you dare to threaten *me!* You've played the great man among the villagers till you think you can face out anything. But you're mistaken, I can tell you. The most foolish thing you ever did in your life was to set a trap for a gentleman. My boy is not such a fool as you take him for. You want to make your daughter a lady; but I warn you, you'll only make her a——"

"Sir Roger," said the blacksmith, "I'm not such a good Christian as you take me for; it's not in my nature to stand silent and bear insult from any man. As for your son, if he was a prince, he isn't the man I would choose for my child. And no more is this the place to discuss

such things; and no more are you a fit person," cried Stanfield, with a sudden flash of indignation from his eyes, which lighted up the whole scene, and thrilled with real alarm his enraged companion, "to take an innocent young woman's name into your lips. I'm not your tenant, nor I don't owe you any duty that I know of, and I'm a man well known, that can be found when I'm wanted. Your son's comings and goings are of little consequence in my house; and I don't know, Sir Roger, that there's anything more to be said between you and me."

"That may be your opinion," said the baronet, placing himself directly in Stanfield's way, "but it is not mine. You may refuse to listen to my warning about your daughter, if you please. She is not the first ambitious girl that has had a downfall—that's your concern. Only let me tell you, my son is my concern, and if you have seduced him into any engagement, or got him to sign any paper——"

"When a man begins to rave, good-breeding's at an end," said the blacksmith, stepping aside in order to pass with a quiet contempt that drove Sir Roger out of his wits for the moment.

"By Jove! I'll have you indicted for conspiracy," cried the little man. "If you have got him to sign anything, or seduced him into any

engagement, mark my word, I'll have you indicted for conspiracy—I will, by ——," cried Sir Roger, in a state of frenzy. He shook his little fist as near as he could reach in Stanfield's eyes, who for his part looked on with compassionate amazement, enough to drive the baronet into actual madness.

"You will do—what you can," said the blacksmith, not without a gleam of humour in his eyes, "and so will I," he continued rather sadly, as he turned away. He had no more heart for any discussion. He groaned within himself as he left the scene of this strange encounter and turned his face homeward. Was it *his* negligence, *his* carelessness, that had brought on the very result he most dreaded, and made the name of his child a subject of discussion for such a man as Sir Roger Trevelyan? The thought wounded him to the heart, for he was very proud in his way, and Agnes was the centre of everything most tender and sacred in the world to her father. Hitherto neither commotion nor disturbance had been in his blameless life. Was the tide turning now, as it sometimes turns, casting light into darkness, and order into confusion? He went home with more heaviness than he had experienced for years, with a premonition in his mind of some other trouble awaiting him. "I should have known

better," he said to himself, with almost a little bitterness. What he should have known better was, that unworthy thoughts come more naturally to the common understanding than thoughts of honour, innocence, and purity; but this was a knowledge which always came slowly after the event to William Stanfield's mind.

The blacksmith went home with a little involuntary apprehension, prepared to hear something that would grieve him; but the calm, ordinary aspect of the house reassured him, and so did his wife's laments over her headache, and the unseasonableness of his absence on this particular evening, when she so much wanted her tea. After a while, however, his anxiety returned. He thought his Agnes more silent than usual as she sat working at the table, though perhaps it was only the trouble in his own mind which he transferred to her looks. He smoothed with natural pride the shining braids of black hair which made her little head heavy with their weight, and looked at her slender hands so unlike his own, and thought for the hundredth time that she might have been a princess, and that it was a strange chance which gave such a daughter to him. "Whom have you seen to-day, and what have you been doing, little one?" he said tenderly, with a tone of apology in his voice.

Mrs. Stanfield dropped the newspaper she was reading, and looked sharply up to listen, and Agnes gave a startled glance from her work.

"The same as other days, father," she said, with a slight faltering; which any other day, perhaps, he would not have remarked.

The words were simple enough, but after they had been spoken a sudden blush, overwhelming and uncontrollable, dyed her very neck as she stooped over her work. What did it mean? The blacksmith's heart sank within him, with a sudden pang of surprise and anguish.

"Who should she see," said Mrs. Stanfield, "but the young squire? he's the only visitor as never fails. I don't mean to say no more about it, master, and I daresay I've said more nor was wanted already; but he's the one as never fails in this house, and he should never more enter this room again, if it was in my hands."

Agnes did not say anything, nor even look up as her stepmother spoke. She only raised, not her head, but her slender throat, still keeping her face downcast, like the face of a lily. It was an unconscious movement, of which few people would have taken any notice; but once more the silent sign of an emotion which he had never

before suspected, struck her father to the heart.

"Hush, Sally," he said, with something like a suppressed groan; "the young squire is nothing to us, nor we to him. He comes here to idle away his time a bit. But Sir Roger has come to the Hall of a sudden, and I daresay Mr. Trevelyan will have other company. We can't expect to see so much of him now."

"Sir Roger's come!" cried the blacksmith's wife in a sudden flutter, which her husband, being otherwise engaged, did not remark. He was watching how the colour gradually paled from his daughter's downcast face, and how irregularly her needle moved in her fingers. "That's news," cried Mrs. Stanfield. "Did you see him, master? He's been long gone from here, and the Hall's a comfortless sort of a place, and he's a man as likes his little comforts: at least, so I've heard," she added, after a short interval, looking up in sudden alarm. But nobody took any notice of her unaccountable interest in Sir Roger. "I am glad for one thing," she continued hastily; "he won't let the young squire come here no more;" and in the midst of her own excitement she cast a glance at Agnes; out of the fiery hazel eyes which, as they kindled, had set her countenance ablaze. But nobody paid any

attention to Mrs. Stanfield. As for the blacksmith, he was still studying with an aching heart the changing colour and trembling hands of his child; and when all at once Agnes looked up in his face, her father faltered and retired from her look, like a man detected, not knowing what apology to make.

"Is there any reason why Mr. Trevelyan should not come here?" the girl asked, looking at him with that steadiness and pale resolution, of which he was scarcely yet aware, but which Mrs. Stanfield was perfectly acquainted with. He was so conscious that he had been watching her, and trying to surprise the secret of her thoughts, that this sudden question abashed and confused him. He hesitated before he could answer—

"Any reason? No—yes. No reason, so far as I am concerned," said the blacksmith; "but there are some folks in the world that think the rich and the poor have nothing to do with each other, and that Sir Roger's son is out of his place in the blacksmith's house. May be, after all, they are right, little one," said Stanfield, lifting his broad luminous eyes, and recovering his composure, to his daughter's face, "for things look different according as you're above or below them, and what's at this line of vision is perhaps

not the best for them that view the world out of the Hall windows. But now his father's come, I daresay we'll see little more of Mr. Roger, Agnes; and it will be no great loss to you or me."

"No," said Agnes. The monosyllable was said almost under her breath, but there was a thrill in her voice which caught her father's ear—a new tone which he could not understand. Then she got up suddenly and put away her work, hovering about the darker end of the room, with her back towards him, while she arranged the basket which contained it. When that was completed at last, she came softly behind her father and leaned over his shoulder to kiss him, he all the while watching her with breathless but secret anxiety. "Good night! You were so long of coming in that it is quite late," said Agnes; and she kissed him over his shoulder with a wile which he in his tender heart, which was aching and yearning over her, understood only too well. He suffered her to go away without trying to discover, what she was so anxious to conceal, the secret in her face.

"And so Sir Roger's come," said the blacksmith's excited wife. "If you see him passing through the village, will you tell me, master? I'd like to have a good look at him, if so be as

he passed the windows; not as I care—but being Mr. Trevelyan's father and—other things," she said, faltering, with an eager glance at her husband; but he, for his part, was thinking of something altogether different, and still took no notice of her looks.

"Sir Roger is nothing to me, Sally. I don't care if I never heard his name, nor his son's name more. I'm tired, and I'm going upstairs," said the blacksmith. His foot sounded heavy on the stair as he went to his room, and his heart felt heavy in his bosom. The future, which heretofore had always spread clear and plain before him, sometimes sad enough, but never confused with complications, had suddenly clouded over to his anxious eyes. All at once he perceived that life had begun to assert its independent claims on the young heart which was almost all the world to him, and that his child had already entered the enchanted country, full of all terrors and joys, where his great love could no longer go with her to defend her from evil. For once he was glad to lay down his head and sleep, or try to sleep, courting forgetfulness. He did not know at the first shock how to bear this visionary separation, which is the most real of all partings—and the consciousness of its reality went to his heart.

These three could almost hear each other's breathing in the silence of the night, but they might have been a thousand miles apart for anything they knew of each other. In the dark, they dwelt apart with their own thoughts, each in a throbbing world of reality, which seemed all too palpable to contain itself in silence. As for Agnes, she stood uncertain upon the verge of a new existence, not knowing whether the steady earth might not crumble under her feet the next moment and the sun go down long before noon. Such a dreadful revolution of nature was inevitable, if Roger Trevelyan went away—but he could not, would not, as she thought to herself in the dark with exquisite tears and pangs of joy, never dreaming, poor innocent soul, that had Roger been obliterated altogether, life and the world would have been so much the better for her. As for Mrs. Stanfield, her ruder and coarser orb of existence thrilled with many a secret that would not bear the light—remembrances and anticipations alien in every particular to her present life. But the silent night spread her veil over all these waking hearts and closed eyes, and told no tales; and everything was quiet, as sleep and safety could make it, under William Stanfield's roof.

CHAPTER V.

The Hall.

THE Hall was not very large, nor any way imposing. It stood in the midst of an irregular and neglected park, where the trees had been left to grow anyhow, and the grass was all in mossy tufts and ragged knolls, neither fair to see nor pleasant to traverse. The family, indeed, had not been seen at Windholm in the memory of man, and the young squire, when he first made his appearance, had been looked upon as a kind of natural phenomenon. The house had no attractions, neither antiquity, nor beauty of situation, nor family associations, nor even comfort. It looked out solely upon that neglected park, where nothing at all was visible from the dull windows except a small dull pond equally in bad order with the rest of the demesne, with slimy banks, and choked up by forests of water-weeds. The sunshine which had revealed to William

Stanfield in such exaggerated distinctness of outline the figure of the unknown lady on the edge of the common, shed a dull red gleam, just before it disappeared finally under the horizon, upon the pool, on which the same lady looked out through the large open windows, of what was called the green drawing-room at the Hall. A more disconsolate-looking room could scarcely be imagined. It had the air of an apartment committed for ages to the care of a housekeeper, whose own room was ten times more important in the house than this uninhabited place. The carpet was so worn and bare that the pattern on it, which was very large, was but faintly decipherable, and the green hangings were at once so dark and so faded as to invest the room with an actual reality of gloom. An old alabaster-stand, supporting something intended for a card-basket, stood alone in the centre of a large table, which was draped with a dingy cover. Dark bad copies of old pictures were on the walls. Altogether it was such a room as might tempt the cheerfulest soul to suicide. The lady, who was still in her riding-dress, was not bright enough in herself to neutralize in any degree this offensive shabbiness. She was leaning her head upon the sash of the open window, holding her hat, which she had just taken off, in her hand, and looking out, watched

without seeing it how the light gradually slid off the slimy pool and disappeared in lingering touches upon the grass, leaving everything stagnant, lifeless, and melancholy behind. Year after year these same windows must have stared blankly out without any living eyes to put perception in them. The whole gaunt house and lonely park seemed to gape and centre round this one unusual living figure. With a slight shiver she closed the window, and threw herself into a chair. The fire was burning dimly, the room was cold, bare, miserable to behold. She shrugged her shoulders, and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Not even a maid to bring one a cup of tea!" said Beatrice Trevelyan.

She was of an age no longer contemptuous of such accessories of comfort. She was a very handsome "fine woman," as critics of the female subject say, but she was thirty, or perhaps a little more. She had failed of those high spirits of youth which are triumphant over scene and surroundings, and though she was not ill-tempered, the aspect of all this dismal background upset her nerves and made her cross and wretched. Perhaps, when she really began to think, her own thoughts were not without some particulars of bitterness; and thus she sat, thrown

back in her chair, without anything to occupy her mind or please her eye, while the light slowly stole out of the dim atmosphere and twilight came into the dull room. She was waiting for some one; but she was not so impatient as a woman in such circumstances has a title to be. She had enough to engage her thoughts, Heaven knows. It was no very bright perspective into which she looked, but, such as it was, it was all her life.

She had been there about half an hour when Sir Roger came in. His voice was audible before he made his personal entry. He was heard in the hall scolding somebody.

"Why the deuce was there not a room fit to sit in? Why the deuce was everything so faded and poor? Where the devil was Mr. Trevelyan?"

The solemn rustle of the housekeeper's curtsies, as she stood in her best silk dress facing her master in the hall, at first slow and dignified, but gradually rising into alarm and fright at his impatience and profane language, brought a languid smile to the face of Beatrice as she sat quietly listening; but Miss Trevelyan did not herself feel at all called upon to interfere. She sat still with perfect composure, without moving, until this cheerful and encouraging accost was

over. It was not her business. For anything that was going to happen, for anything he might have to tell her, she was content to wait. When the door of the drawing-room was at last thrown open, and Sir Roger appeared against the fuller light in the hall, his daughter still did not move, but sat waiting for him without even so much animation as might suffice to show him in the twilight whereabouts she was. He came in, peering into the dim space and silence of the melancholy room, and exclaiming over it—

"Miserable hole—beastly place! What on earth ever induced any man to settle here? Beatrice, where the deuce are you? Detestable pigsty! Beatrice! Oh, you're there! Why the d—— couldn't you speak?"

"You have not been successful, I see," said Miss Trevelyan out of the darkness.

"How the deuce do you know I haven't been successful? I *have* been successful. I've seen that d—— humbug of a blacksmith. He's a specimen, he is," said the baronet. "I'll tell you what, Beatrice, you have a great opinion of your own wisdom, and you were dead against coming—but if I hadn't come, I'll lay you anything they'd have worked him up to marry the girl."

"And what then?" said the unmoved and almost invisible listener in the easy-chair.

"What then! Hang it, do you mean to say you're such a confounded fool as not to see," said Sir Roger; "a blacksmith's daughter—a girl as ignorant as—as sin—a——"

"You mistake—it's innocence that's ignorant, not sin," said Miss Trevelyan.

"By ——! you're in one of your confounded tempers—but I don't care; I've settled that matter," said her father. "Are we ever going to have any dinner to-day? What do you mean by sitting there in your riding-dress, eh?—do you mean to dine like that, or to keep me waiting an hour for you—which I shan't, by Jove! I tell you I've settled all that—Roger will find himself in the wrong box if he tries to master me. What do *you* mean by turning on a man? You're deeply attached to your brother, and all that, ain't you? Yes, when he don't come in your way; but I've settled his little matter, I can tell you. You all think yourselves very clever, but you are neither of you a match for me."

"I like my brother well enough, sir," said Beatrice—"as well as I like anybody. I have no hand in this, and don't know anything about it. I daresay you've done more harm than good—

I always said you would; but, at all events, you've had your will, and that is always something. I suppose there's some room in the house we can dine in,"—she continued, rising, with a shiver,—"as for sleeping, I would not advise you to build your hopes too high. There's Roger coming up the avenue. You had better not attack him directly about this business, if I might advise."

So saying she went away, rather hastily, gliding through the darkness with her long riding-skirt gathered up in her hands. It was kindly done for once. She meant to give her brother some warning before he encountered his father. She drew the door of the drawing-room close behind her, and paused under the dull lamp which had just been lighted in the hall. Her tall slight figure, with its long sweep of drapery, falling close, with a grace unknown to any other female garment at the present era, was the first thing that caught young Roger's eye, as he came, with his mind full of Agnes, into the dingy house. He stared at her, first with utter blank wonder, then with a presentiment of what had happened. Before he could say anything, she went up to him softly, holding up a warning finger.

"We have come to look after you," she said,

in a low tone. "Hush! papa's there. Keep your temper, Roger—he can't do *you* much harm, except for the moment," said Miss Trevelyan, with involuntary bitterness. "I will stand by you as much as I can; but keep your temper, Roger." She bent forward to kiss him as she spoke; she was quite as tall and a good deal older than he was. For the moment, something sisterly, motherly, was in her heart. She pressed the hand of her young brother as he stood amazed, scarcely knowing what he was about, before her. Beatrice thus expanding, softening over him—his father close by, come with obvious intentions of interference—all this, combined with those revelations which his heart had just been making to him, confused and confounded the young squire. He could make no answer, except in the shape of some inarticulate questions to Beatrice before she hurried away—and then he paused before entering the dark drawing-room, like a man about to plunge into a dangerous sea. This was indeed an awakening out of romance, and the sweet mystery of early love. The sudden blow stunned Roger. He turned back for an instant and glanced out into the darkling park, with an impulse not of flight but of delay—for he was not in the least prepared for such an interview. Keep his temper! Well, it must be

tried, at least—and making a dash into it, he turned rapidly round and plunged into the room, where his father was vapouring in the dark, waiting for him, waiting for dinner, waiting for light and comfort, and his valet, and all the natural solacements, which were slow of coming in this dreary place. Roger, with a little tremor and a little disgust, which, to tell the truth, were sensations natural to him when he encountered his father, made his salutations as cordially as he could manage to do. He might express his surprise at least—his utter wonder and amazement at so unexpected a visit. "I thought you were in Cornwall, sir," said the young man; "I hope there's some dinner fit to eat—we are not great in cookery here. I must go and speak to Mrs. Sutton and see what she can do."

"If I'm not in Cornwall, I'm in my own house, I hope," said the ungracious sire. "Let Mrs. Sutton alone—Bevis has seen after that. But where the deuce is my room, can you tell me? How the —— does that fellow suppose I can find my own way about this beastly place? I never was here before in my life—not since I was a young fellow like you. Where's my room, eh? There's no bell that I can lay my hand on. What does that confounded fellow Baker mean by letting a place go all to sticks like this; and

why didn't you have your wits about you and look after it? By Jove, it's enough to make a man swear; why, it might be let and bring in so much a year, instead of going to the dogs like this. I ask you where the deuce is my room?"

"Which room is it?" said Roger, leading the way with some eagerness upstairs.

"How the deuce can I tell which room it is?" said his tired and hungry parent. "Pretty sort of thing, after a man has been exerting himself all day, to be asked which room he has in his own house. Call some one, can't you? I suppose you've found some mode of communication with the servants, eh? Oh, here's Bevis. Why the d—— didn't you come and show me the way? Here's my son wants to know what room I have—hang it, which room have I? Much you seem to know about this blessed place—spend all your time mooning about the village, I suppose," said Sir Roger, in a lower tone, with an angry glance at his son. "We'll talk about that after dinner;" and with these comforting words the baronet retired to his apartment, where Bevis, who was his master's faithful slave, had provided for his comforts as well as was possible. Roger could still hear the lessening fire of complaint and exclamation as he stood for a moment to take breath outside the closed door. Then he

went away with a clouded face to change his dress. Altogether this had been an exciting day to the young squire. His love had forced itself upon his consciousness without any will of his own. This morning it had been but a vague atmosphere of delight and longing which surrounded him. Now he knew what it meant—that perpetual recurrence of Agnes's name and looks in his heart, and the discovery had not been one of unmitigated pleasure. To find out suddenly, as he had done, in the course of his walk home, that the happiness of his life, according to his young belief, was in the hands of the blacksmith's daughter, was naturally, when he came to put it into words, something of a shock to Roger. But shock though it was, it was true, beyond the possibility of a doubt; and many a troubled yet delicious meditation had possessed the young man's mind as he came slowly home in the twilight to the deserted Hall. What he had met on arriving here had driven all the delight away, and brought back the trouble tenfold. He saw what was coming upon him, and, what was worse even than his father's rage and coarse remonstrances, he saw the real grievance of the matter, and that this time Sir Roger had an unquestionable right to interfere. The poor youth went to his own room sighing like furnace, feeling to the bottom

of his heart that it was a fool's paradise in which he had been wandering, and that now his terrible dilemma had come home to him. Had Sir Roger come but one day earlier, his son would have met him with comparative calmness. It was only now—only in this walk home—only in this last interview, that the poor young fellow had found himself out. And what was he to do? Agnes was peerless—a bride for a king; but alas! the blacksmith's daughter of Windholm was not a wife for Sir Roger Trevelyan's son, as the young Oxford man knew but too well. If he was a goose, as William Stanfield said, he was an honourable one, pure in his mind and thoughts, little as he owed to training or example. To leave her would be like rending soul from body; but something in his heart told him it was his duty to leave her; to tear himself from the sweet delight of her presence—to get far away from that one fair garden in the desert-world, which contained her. His heart sank and sank till it seemed to lie within him like a stone. But a faint gleam of sublime duty flickered dimly on his firmament. He felt as if he could do it for her sake—could part himself from light and hope, and every joy on earth—that so, perhaps, she might never find out the sweet precipice, on the edge of which they had both been dallying. Such was the

height of virtue, of which, with silent anguish, young Roger felt himself capable, as he dressed for dinner that eventful evening. There were no lights nor any kind of comfort in his room, the sudden arrival of the baronet having turned everything upside down in the house; but the darkness and the absence of the usual solacements were a kind of consolation to the poor young fellow. To be permitted to feel entirely miserable and to ignore all possible alleviations is a comfort in the first troubles of youth.

CHAPTER VI.

Beatrice.

MISS TREVELYAN was of a very different mind. She had brought no maid with her on this hurried journey; there was no one, as she had sighed downstairs, who had even so much common thoughtfulness as to bring the poor lady a cup of tea. She had no time to go leisurely about her toilette, nor to rest after her fatigues, but must make a rush at it—must unpack her things with her own hands, and get herself into her dress forthwith. The room was dark and heavy, oppressed with curtains, which Beatrice, having lately taken a slight sanitary turn, could not endure, and which certainly added much to the ghostly, dark, damp aspect of the great gloomy apartment, where all the furniture was faded, as was the case throughout the Hall. Two candles on the dressing-table, throwing a kind of dark radiance into the glass, was all the light there was; and the fire sputtered and hissed in a vain attempt

to kindle the green wood with which some ignorant hands had tried to light it. Miss Trevelyan had no overwhelming misery in hand to blind her to those little details of discomfort; she had only her unsatisfactory life, in which there was little that it was pleasant to look upon. Her heart was heavy, too; but it was a kind of heaviness very different from that which had plucked poor Roger's down out of the sky into those fathomless abysses. Beatrice's heart was always heavy—it felt like a stone, let her do what she would; she was used to that half-physical, half-spiritual sensation, which she carried with her through many amusements, and even through various circumstances in themselves exciting enough. She was unhappy without knowing why; just as some people are happy in equal ignorance of the cause—and, like those happier souls, had ceased to think of it, or to wonder why it was. It was her natural and inevitable condition. Her mind was a little roused, a little softened, to-night. She was sorry for her young brother, whose present position recalled to her the dormant romance which every woman has somehow in her mind. Beatrice, too, had once been in love, and ready to commit herself, and forget her position, and relinquish her better prospects and marry a poor man; or at least so she imagined. It

was Sir Roger, of course, who prevented it, and there was nobody who did not applaud him, for that act at least, of his not praiseworthy life. It was a long time ago, and Miss Trevelyan had outlived that trifling occurrence—long outlived it; she had even ceased to think of it for years, and would have been quite content to marry two or three times over, had all gone well. But still at moments of special bitterness it returned to her, and she was able to indulge in the sentiment of disappointment, and to say to herself that her life and happiness had been shipwrecked upon that early rock—which was not true, she knew, yet was true in its fashion, and was a kind of comfort to her. She would have been thinking of that at the present crisis if she had not been so much worried and bothered by the unpacking of the little valise which contained her dress. It was a great nuisance, and gave a sharp edge and pungency to the quiet, sombre, unresisted unhappiness, which was her usual condition. So very different was it with her in the experience and maturity of her life, and with Roger in his young despair and anguish. After all, there was not more than nine or ten years' difference between them; but in such a life as that of Beatrice ten years might have counted for a century.

Things modified a little when the housekeeper appeared to offer her assistance, carrying, after all,

the cup of tea which Miss Trevelyan wanted so much. Beatrice threw herself into a chair exhausted, and not very amiable, though a certain grace of high-breeding, more natural than acquired, prevented her from showing any temper to the woman, who rustled about in her silk gown, and was inclined, after a long independent reign, to be perhaps rather more friendly than obsequious. Miss Trevelyan put on her dressing-gown and loosed out her hair, and looked with longing eyes at the sofa, where, however, she could not lie down just now, to keep Sir Roger waiting for dinner. Her hair was light-brown, not so abundant as it once had been, wonderfully soft, and light, and feathery; hair that had no weight nor substance in it, but floated in light clouds, with a beauty of its own. The face it shaded was a remarkable one: high but delicate features, a slightly aquiline nose, lips beautiful, but somewhat pale and somewhat thin—all took marks of age more distinct than simpler beauty is subject to. Her eyes were grey in this dim light—light-grey, not very noticeable, except that the brows contracted over them with a slight pucker as they looked into the darkness, and gave them a certain aspect of intentness; but in the daylight and the sunshine Beatrice Trevelyan's eyes had been the subject of many a trope and

metaphor. They were the colour of light, many an admiring voice had said, and the description was true—a lustrous golden-grey, a tint so strange that description might easily glide from beauty to deformity in endeavouring to explain their power. They had, indeed, been called cat's-eyes by the envious, though no greater blunder could have been made. When she was pleasantly excited, they shone like pure translucent orbs of gold, or embodied sunshine. If it had ever happened to Beatrice Trevelyan to be happy, they would have been glorious, those strange eyes of light; as it was, in the dark, in the fatigue and dulness of this hasty unwilling toilette, they subsided into grey eyes, light in hue, but intent in gaze, with a pucker over each delicate brow.

"I've done the best I could for dinner, ma'am," said the housekeeper; "it was such short notice. Mr. Bevis says as master, I mean Sir Roger, is awful particular—but I said that Miss Trevelyan, as looked a kind lady, would perhaps say a word for us—as we was hurried like, and had no time."

"I daresay it will do very well," said Beatrice.

"It comes so strange—it makes a body feel so strange," said the housekeeper, "never to set eyes on one o' the family, and then all of a sudden to have 'em all come home; you can't

think, ma'am, you as are a lady, and ain't likely to enter into our feelin's, what a queer feel it has. But I suppose it's all along o' young master, and thinking, as was natural, that he'd be moping at the Hall?"

To this Miss Trevelyan made no answer. She was brushing her hair, and the light waves, moved even by her breath, and by the air that stole through the large cold room, floated all about and over her face.

"But a young gentleman seldom mopes, as far as I can see" said Mrs. Sutton, confidentially, as she laid out the gloves, the scarf, and the handkerchief which Miss Trevelyan's maid had arranged in symmetrical order as her mistress would want them. "It ain't like a lady, ma'am. Lord bless you, there's always amusement o' one kind or another to be had about a village; there's the three Miss Foxes at the Cedars wouldn't have spared no pains, if the young master had taken to *them*—but gentlemen is capricious. They'll please their fancy, they will; it don't matter where they go. I'm as glad as I can be, though I'm only a servant, that you, ma'am, and Sir Roger has come to the Hall."

"What time is dinner?" asked Beatrice, quietly.

This question had a wonderful effect upon the

communicative housekeeper. She grew red, she became confused, she stopped short all at once in the stream of disclosures which had just begun. She had meant to tell Roger's sister all about the blacksmith's daughter, and the danger into which that deceitful creature was inveigling the dear young gentleman; but Mrs. Sutton, good woman, was totally unaccustomed to fine company and did not understand the perfect lady-like calm with which Miss Trevelyan ignored all she had been saying. With a flush and tremor the good woman answered briefly, "Half-past seven," as she spread out the dress, which was scarcely so fine as her own, upon the bed.

"Then there is not a minute to spare," said the courteous mistress. "Will you give me my dress, Mrs. Sutton, please?—I am quite ready. If we stay over to-morrow, let it be at seven—that is always Sir Roger's hour," said Miss Trevelyan, blandly. The housekeeper did what service was required of her after this in affronted silence, and swept forth out of the room, when Beatrice's gentle "thank you, that will do," dismissed her, with sentiments anything but dutiful. Miss Trevelyan, who was not too sensitive to other people's feelings, did not waste a moment thinking of the discomfiture of her attendant. She took up one of the candles and

went to the large dark mirror, which failed to derive anything but a twilight glimmer of illumination from the scanty light in the room, and looked at herself anxiously in it, a look not of self-admiration but of curious, intent spectatorship. She looked at herself as though she were saying:—"Beatrice Trevelyan is growing old very fast—she is going off, poor thing! It is such a pity that she is not married." Such was the expression of her eyes as she looked with characteristic intentness and with that anxious pucker in her forehead into the glass, which revealed her dimly in her tall and fine proportions, with the dress which she felt to be shabby, and the face which she knew to be fading. Every day she made that same inspection —and perhaps, if she had but known it, those daily gazings, intent and serious, deepened the lines which, with a closer inspection, she noted every day in her own face.

And then she dropped again into her chair for the few spare minutes she had, and by means of Roger guided herself back to the long-buried romance of her own youth, which with a little harmless self-deception she could persuade herself had broken her heart and taken away her interest in life. But unfortunately, from that the passage was easy to the real shadow of

Beatrice Trevelyan's existence. She was not a saintly, heart-broken maiden, loving once and no more; she was a woman of very imperfect education, high spirit, and some ambition, who knew to the bottom of her heart that her only chance for life—for such a life as she thought worth having—lay in marriage. But who would marry Sir Roger Trevelyan's daughter? She smiled an indignant scornful smile which expanded her pale lip painfully as she recalled the words she had said to her brother—"He can only harm *you* for a time." He had harmed Beatrice all her life. Good men had stood aloof from the disreputable baronet's child; young fools whom she despised, and vile men whom she was woman enough to hate, had courted her favour; once or twice, when the heavens seemed to smile, her father's reputation or presence had come in again like an ugly shadow between her and a better fate. She was fully sensible of this bitterness of her life, but she did not leave him nor think of leaving him, notwithstanding. He had a respect for his daughter which he had for nobody else in the world; and she perhaps, with all her sense of wrong, with all her indignation, with the sensible blight upon her which came from him, still after a kind loved her father, who, except young Roger, a boy whom she had

never much noticed, was all she had in the world.

But, now and then, to think of it all was very near too much for Miss Trevelyan. It was so to-night, as she sat waiting for the dinner-bell, resolved not to go downstairs till the last moment. Recollections of one time and another, when that shabby figure had come between her and everything that made it worth while to live, rose bitterly upon her heart. What could Roger's wrongs ever be to hers? Her father's appearance had quenched the incipient love more than once or twice in the breast of an honourable man, to whom Beatrice Trevelyan would have made a true wife, had it been so ordered. It was not a high view, certainly, of a woman's heart or hopes; but it was true that there were two or three in the past—as indeed there might even yet be some in the future—whose appearance had quickened in the mind of Beatrice all those thrills of ambition and hopes of advancement, which, if she had been a man, she might have carried out in more legitimate ways. It was not mercenary hope, either, poor soul—it was advancement to a better life, and not simply to greater wealth or rank. It was even a solace to the woman's pride in her that she had refused various suitors among her father's associates, who offered sullied names to

her acceptance. But necessity was desperate in her case. Since she was a girl, she had been aware that she must marry, if she was to be anyhow delivered from the atmosphere in which she found herself. She still knew the same necessity unchanged, though she was no longer a girl. Some people would describe Beatrice as an old maid going back upon her disappointments. Poor soul! it was comforting to her heart to fall back when she could upon that old piece of girlish sentiment, and to think, if her first love had not been thwarted, what a different life hers might have been! But that was not the real grievance which made her heart bitter within her. When she heard the dinner-bell she got up and moved away through the dim room, not without another glance at the dark surface of the glass; not that she cared for her appearance then or there—only because it was her habit, and because she never could refrain from that silent inquiry, out of which so little comfort could be got. The mirror kept telling her, like a pretentious and unseasonable preacher, that her autumn was waning, and that she was growing old; but, disagreeable as was the response, she never could help repeating the question—a question much too profound for vanity, and involving all that was most serious in her life.

CHAPTER VII.

After Dinner.

"YOU don't know what you are speaking of, sir. I beg your pardon, father, I mean no disrespect; but I tell you, you don't know who or what you are speaking of. For Heaven's sake, say no more!" cried Roger, with such a flush of shame and outraged love and wounded pride as scorched the young man's cheeks. He was boiling over with indignation and misery, but, with all the force he could put upon himself, was endeavouring to keep his passion down.

"Don't talk such confounded nonsense to me," said Sir Roger. "Hang it, I knew it all before you were born. You can't say I'm a hard overseer, or one that stops you of a little amusement; on the contrary, I tell you this girl——"

"And I tell you," cried the young man in desperation, "that I will hear nothing more.

Have you no pity—no—no shame, sir? My sister is in the house—that ought to be enough; not to say that you are insulting a creature—of whom I dare not trust myself to speak," cried poor Roger; "of whom you can't form any conception. No more, no—I cannot hear any more. My sister is in the house."

"What the deuce has your sister to do with it?" said the baronet. "I never said you were to bring her here. Beatrice has seen a good deal in her time, by Jove she has! She knows better than a milksop like you. Why, I suppose you must have your day, like the rest of us. I don't want to be hard upon you. I can't pretend to be an example, my boy, and you know it, so I never take up the preaching line; but if you let yourself be inveigled into any d——d folly, sir," said Sir Roger, striking the table with his hand; "if you commit yourself and your family, and give a confounded set of beggars any power over you—as it's my opinion you're on the eve of doing—if you prove yourself such a deuced idiot, there's an end of any intercourse between you and me. By Jove, you shall suffer for it! By ——, sir, I tell you, you shall rue your folly. Not a penny of my money shall go to support King Cophetua. But take it in a different light," said the worthy baronet, lowering

his voice; and he proceeded to enlarge upon the subject in a way which drove his unfortunate hearer half mad with terror and rage.

The interview was prolonged so much beyond what Beatrice expected, that, sitting alone in the gloomy, ghostly drawing-room, and being well aware of Sir Roger's habits, Miss Trevelyan was struck with pity for her young brother, who had been absent for a long time, and had not become accustomed to all the odious particulars of those evening sittings. She wrapt her shawl round her, and went and tapped at the door of the dining-room; then, receiving no answer, opened it.

"Come outside with your cigars—it is a beautiful night," she said; but stopped short in her invitation, involuntarily arrested by what she saw.

Sir Roger was sitting over his wine, which had already begun to tell upon him, talking incessantly, babbling without being conscious, apparently, of any interruption. It was his own vile experiences which the wretched father had entered into, his potations having loosened his tongue, and confused his brain sufficiently, to make him forget that it was his son to whom he was speaking. Roger, for his part, had got up and stood with his hand grasping the back of his chair, waiting for an

opportunity to say something which that hideous tipsy monologue left him no room for. When he saw his sister he gave a violent start, and waved his hand to her with an imperative commanding gesture.

"Go away, Beatrice, go away!" he cried, violently.

At this sudden sound the baronet looked up.

"Oh, it's Beatrice, is it? let her come in. She don't mind," he said, with a detestable tipsy smile. "She agrees with me in every word I say."

Young Roger turned round and swept out upon his wondering, watching sister, whose curiosity was much roused and sharpened by the scene, like some indignant youthful angel, as she thought. And even Beatrice felt herself startled into a horror and disgust more lively than she imagined herself capable of feeling for any wickedness. He grasped her by the arm and thrust her out of the room, and shut the door behind him with nervous violence.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed, with a long groan out of his very heart, turning to the open hall door, from which came a fresh gust of out-door air.

The young man seized an outer coat, which hung on a stand. He wanted no company just then, but only to rush out into the pure air, and

wash away those horrible suggestions in the silence of the night; but he would not leave his sister at the door.

"Don't go back to the drawing-room, Beatrice," said Roger, "don't wait for—for him. He's taken too much wine, I suppose. Go to your own room. Go to bed. Don't listen to any of his talk. He doesn't seem to know what he's saying to-night."

As Beatrice looked into his pale, indignant face, it almost appeared to her for the moment that here was a brother who might stand by and deliver a poor woman such as she. She looked at him wistfully as he stood urging her to go upstairs, and evidently longing to get out and away from her. Then she tied her handkerchief over her head, and drew her shawl closer round her, and took his arm with a sense of affectionateness which she had scarcely felt before in her life.

"I will go out with you, Roger, first," she said—"it is a lovely night—and I do so want to speak to you; he'll go to sleep now—he always does. Don't be afraid for me; he never does anything worse than swear in my presence. What's the matter, dear?—Roger, you and I scarcely know each other—but I am your sister all the same. It would do me good, perhaps, i

you were to take me into your confidence. What is all this about?"

After a long silence—"I can't tell you," said Roger, abruptly. "Nothing is the matter—never mind—Sir Roger's conversation won't bear repeating," said the brother to the sister—and then there followed a stifled exclamation of rage and indignation. Beatrice did not know what her father had been saying; but it was not difficult to jump at the conclusion that it had been something too offensive to be borne.

"Never mind that," she said, softly—"I want to hear about yourself. Something has happened—you may safely tell me, Roger—if I can help you I will; and if I can't, nobody shall ever hear of it again."

So by degrees she won him to open his heart. When he had once begun to speak, the flood came fully, without stint or reserve. It was a comfort to be able to show how deeply injured and insulted he was—how he had been making up his mind to sublime self-sacrifice when his father attacked him on the subject in a way which Roger could not describe. They walked up and down upon the dewy grass, under the faint stars, talking softly, confidentially, as any brother and sister might. They had a long consultation, interesting and perhaps

comforting to both; but yet there was one particular which chilled Roger, and irritated him he could scarcely tell how. He had told his sister about Agnes—all her loveliness, her gracefulness, her entire superiority to the circumstances around her, and how she knew nothing of his love, and how he had made up his mind never to wound her tender heart by the discovery, but to go away while yet she had not found it out. This he said, perhaps, hoping that Beatrice being a woman, might be romantic and contradict him somehow in this settled purpose of his. Beatrice was full of sympathy, but she took it all for granted in the most matter of fact way. It never seemed to occur to her as possible that any other conclusion could come; it was the natural and only thing to do; though she was as sorry for him as if he had lost a great deal of money, or met with any other great misfortune which necessitated an instant change of life. As they walked up and down, talking it all over, Roger's heart rebelled more and more with every sympathetic word his sister addressed to him. The more pitifully she talked of this folly which was over and ended, the more his strong, young, hitherto uncontradicted energy set in the other direction. He was first saddened and then roused and irritated by the unalterable character

with which she seemed to invest his hasty heroical purpose of self-sacrifice. After all, was it so very certain that he must go away? Finally, Beatrice did him more harm than even his father had done. She left him with a sisterly kiss and warm pressure of his hand, saying, as any sensible woman would, that he was still young, and that hard as it was, he would get over it, and be very glad that he had courage to withdraw at once and do what was right. She left him calmed, as she thought, to smoke his cigar, and perhaps indulge in a few fond sad thoughts of the village beauty, from whom in his high principle he was about to flee; but in reality she left him in a state of restrained impatience and resentment, with new impulses of rebellion in his heart, chafing at the cold wisdom which would bind him to such a sacrifice. All very well for Beatrice—what did she know about it? It was so easy to bid another give up all the light and joy of life for the sake of duty. Duty!—was it duty?—and then ensued all those questionings in which every mind which takes time to deliberate in the face of a great danger, loses itself and its certainties. It was in this state of endless angry self-argument, sometimes working himself up to hasty resolves of passion, sometimes going back for a moment to see the truth, and again chafing

wildly over his father's insulting advice, and that pity of his sister which never contemplated the possibility of any happier alternative—that young Roger spent the night; the same night on which Agnes, momentarily chilled by the thought that he might go away, was lying awake in the dark, feeling, in a sweet glow of faith and certainty, that he would not—could not. Such was the difference between the man and the woman—or rather between the youth already tossed about between duty and his heart's desire, and the girl who knew as yet no complications in the harmony of her life.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Blacksmith's Resolution.

SIR ROGER got up late next morning, as was his custom, and Beatrice and her brother breakfasted together in a restraint and silence which she thought strange enough after the affectionate confidence of last night. Perhaps Miss Trevelyan had never known what it was to love anybody with the *abandon* of youth. Certainly, had it been possible for her to permit her affections to be engaged by anyone in the position of William Stanfield's daughter, she would have cut the knot, as soon as she discovered it, with unflinching steadiness. Such a connexion was simply impossible, and accordingly she did not understand the injured, sullen, resentful look which sat upon her brother's face and characterised his manner. She did not understand that her very acquiescence in his decision, her acceptance of it as a matter of course, was gall and bitterness to poor Roger,

who, the more she ignored it, turned the more to a happier alternative, and began to think it possible in proportion as she put her sympathetic seal upon its impossibility. Bevis brought them word, when they had finished breakfast, that Sir Roger meant to leave the Hall after luncheon. He and Miss Trevelyan had been visiting at somebody's house not very far off, though the young squire was unaware of their vicinity, and there they were now to return. When Roger heard this, he took leave of his sister. "I don't want to see him again," said the young man—"no good could come of it, Beatrice. Good-bye! I'll write to *you*. There won't be very much to tell, I daresay; but I'll write."

"And you'll leave the Hall to-day, Roger?" said Miss Trevelyan.

"Where shall I go?" he asked with suppressed indignation and sullenness.

"Anywhere, dear—any place that will be amusing," said his sister, soothing him. "You might go up to town, or go and see some of your friends. There is Fred Pendarves, who always was so fond of you—but to be sure he is in Parliament, and has a great deal to do. Ah! I wish you were in Parliament, Roger; it would give you some occupation. But you know there are plenty of people who would be glad to have you. There are some nice

people at the Horsleys', where we are staying; but I daresay you would not like to go there. I think you had much better go to town. It must be getting pleasant now; and poor Fred Pendarves will be so glad to see you. Good-bye—God bless you! You'll be sure to write and tell me where you are?"

"Yes," said the young squire, who had no benediction to bestow. He left her immediately, and went out with a dull resentment in his heart. What did it matter where he went?—anywhere that would amuse him!—that was all that even Beatrice, who was a woman, and might know better, could recommend to him. He wandered about in a furtive, aimless way, always pondering, deliberating, making up his mind that he really must leave the Hall to-day, with a mental reservation behind, which he kept out of his own sight with natural timidity until he had seen Sir Roger and Beatrice ride off, with Bevis behind them, upon their long ride to Horsley Park. Then it turned out that it was just about his usual hour for going down to the village. For the last time. It would be uncivil to William Stanfield, who was a natural gentleman, to go away without saying good-bye; it would be rude to Agnes. And so the young man set out, not without a breathless, vague imagination that something might happen

to delay the departure upon which he had resolved —yes, resolved—that is, if nothing came in the way.

And everything looked so precisely the same as it had done yesterday! the common expanding just as before with its early gorse blossoms to the sun—the boys playing cricket just the same—the common incidents of the village identical with the incidents of yesterday; yet he felt his breath come short as he drew near the house, and as soon as he came within sight, put up his glass to his eye, being shortsighted like his father and sister, to see whether there was anything in its aspect to correspond with the change in himself. Had the blinds been all down, and the livery of death upon the house, it would scarcely have surprised Roger. The wonder was that it should look just as usual, and that absolutely nothing had happened anywhere to make any show upon the face of the earth. Only he was changed. The windows were open, the white curtains fluttering, the sun just beginning to gleam sidelong along the front of the house, upon which at sunset it shone so full. There was even, he thought, a figure to be discovered working at the parlour-window. His heart yearned over that faint outline—poor foolish fellow! Would she care? Would it cloud her face or dim her sweet looks to learn that he came

to say good-bye?—and if it did, what then? He went on a little faster to the familiar door.

But under the archway—a strange sight to see in the working day—William Stanfield himself was standing. Roger's heart beat higher when he caught sight of the blacksmith standing sentinel at his own door. Here, at least, was another visible symptom of change. His steps slackened again in spite of himself. He did not know what he could say in case the blacksmith addressed him on this subject, which was a thing he had never anticipated. As he came slowly across the village green, with the natural awkwardness of a man who feels himself for a long time exposed to the full gaze of the person he is going to see, his last night's prudent thoughts came back to him oddly enough, just at the moment when their recurrence was painful. To meet the blacksmith's broad open gaze, just as he began to recollect that, love or no love, the blacksmith's daughter was no mate for him, was hard upon an inexperienced spirit; for the youth could no more help looking up to William Stanfield than he could help perceiving that the blacksmith was bigger, stronger, altogether in point of nature a more notable personage than himself. Almost Roger Trevelyan would have withdrawn if he

could from the encounter. But it was not so to be.

"Good morning," said the blacksmith; "I came out to have a bit of talk with you, Mr. Trevelyan. It's not my custom to mind what folks say; but I'm given to understand there are more prudent ways o' working, and a man's never too old to learn."

"Do you mean it's more prudent not to admit me?" cried Roger, jumping at the heart of the matter with involuntary temerity. He felt himself turned back with such an irresistible moral force as the blacksmith turned away from that door, always up to this time so hospitably open to him.

"Well, perhaps that's the plain English of it," said William Stanfield, with his slow smile, in which, however, there was a little trouble; "that is, not meaning what I think myself, but what other people think, Mr. Trevelyan. When a man's left to puzzle out things by himself, he don't always fall into the beaten way; but I'm not clear but what the beaten way's the safest for most folks' feet. Not meaning to be unkind or uncivil," said the blacksmith, turning upon the young man when they were fairly out of the village green upon the outskirts of the common, "though what I've got to say may seem so. I'm

very glad to see you in my house—and so are all there," he added, as if in an unconscious parenthesis, "but when you come to think of it, the blacksmith's house ain't the place for the squire's son. I don't know why, for my part, seeing we want nothing of you—nor you of us," said the blacksmith, looking steadily, with a little emphasis, in Roger's face, "except converse and good company; but so it is, according to most folks' ways of thinking; and wishing you every good, Mr. Trevelyan, and feeling I'm a fool to do such a thing as this, I must ask you not to come to my house any more."

"Not to come—any more?" repeated Roger, who was struck dumb, half with surprise, more than half with offence, and was not aware what words they were which escaped from him in his amazement. Of course it agreed exactly with his own resolutions; but people are seldom much delighted to find their resolutions, however painful, forestalled so completely by the event.

"No more!" said William Stanfield. "I don't say it without a little shame o' myself, Mr. Trevelyan, nor with any but kind feelings to you. There's a deal of better company in the world than we are. It's less of a loss to you than to us," he continued kindly, moved by the blank aspect of the young man's face.

The young squire felt the ground taken from under his feet. He was utterly confused for the moment—stupid with wretchedness, and disgust, and disappointed love. It was not even he who was retiring from the field—he was being sent away; and, however he might rebel against other authorities, William Stanfield meant it, and in the calm of his regretful resolution was invincible. Standing blank before this compassionate immovable man, poor Roger found nothing to say but the least prudent, the most foolish words he could have uttered. "And Agnes?" he said, in the bitterness of his heart—"Agnes! am I not to see her once—not once before we part?"

"Agnes!" said Stanfield, with a great crimson flush darting in an instant over his face. He lifted his large brown eyes in a perfect blaze of light, suddenly roused by the only touch in the world which could have moved him to passion. "Agnes! and what have you to do with Agnes, young man?" he went on, sternly subduing himself, but quite unable to bring down this sudden excitement to his usual calm. He stood steady and inexorable before young Trevelyan, fixing upon him those broad Juno-eyes, which were almost awful in their unwonted light. If he had been conscious of any evil intention in respect to her, or even of any frivolous thought, Roger must have

been overwhelmed by that steadfast gaze. But he was himself too much absorbed and carried away by his own emotions to be moved by a look.

"What have I to do with her?" said the young squire, bitterly; "oh, nothing, I suppose—nothing; now that you have settled it between you, my father and you. It does not matter that I love her—it does not matter that she——"

"Hush!" said Stanfield, lifting his large hand, "nothing about her; but I beg your pardon, Mr. Trevelyan, I had forgotten about love, and that you were young. I should not have led you into temptation. Now, perhaps the less we say the better; between you and me," said the blacksmith, proudly declining to introduce his daughter's name, "there may be a kind of friendship—but no nearer nor further connexion, as you are well aware. So it's best that we say good-bye without any reflections. Talking's good for little; but I think the kinder of you for this," he said, stretching out his large hand. Roger had no heart to take it, no will to be dismissed, every individual feeling in him revolted against submission. He turned away with a choking sensation of powerlessness yet resistance.

"What is the use of offering me your hand?" said the youth; "if you trusted me as a gentle-

man—as a man—you would never turn me away from your door. What have I done? If you had been a prince, I could not have approached with more respect—with greater honour. Stanfield! have a little pity; let me see her again. I will take no advantage, I will not say a word to disturb her, unless—— I pledge you my word to go away—never to trouble you more; only let me see her once again!"

Once more the blacksmith held out his large hand. He looked with the tenderness and pity of a man who was a father, yet had not outlived the sentiments of his youth, upon the poor young lover. Perhaps a silent thrill of pride to find that his Agnes, after all, was worthily thought of, moved his heart. But he was inexorable. "No," he said, with a voice which changed and trembled with unusual music in the sympathy which was fellow-feeling and made him once more young—"no, better not for both. Mr. Trevelyan, I put my confidence in you," said Stanfield, who would not believe in anybody by halves; "she is young and don't know herself as yet. Is it not your duty as well as mine to protect her from—from making any discoveries that might—— I'm an incautious man. I say more than there's any need to say. Leave her alone, Mr. Trevelyan, in the quiet of her youth."

"Then you think——?" said Roger, all in a sudden glow of pride and happiness.

"I think nothing, sir," said the blacksmith, with a momentary return of sternness, "except that I appeal to your honour—and your—love, if it is so, to come no more to my house; not to say that if you refuse, I am a man that can guard my house from any visitor I disapprove of; but these are not the terms I want to put it on," said Stanfield, with once again that softening musical thrill in his voice. "Good-bye, sir, and God bless you! We'll think of you long at Windholm—but the best wish I can wish for us all, more's the pity, is that we may never see you more."

With these words, William Stanfield turned away. He could neither trust himself to say any more, nor to listen further to his eager young companion. Roger was left standing on the soft grass of the common with a kind of stupefied sense that he had here come in contact with the inevitable, and could do himself no good by any struggle or resistance. When he recovered he went back in a tremor of suppressed excitement to the Hall, many a wild scheme flashing through his mind the while. He gave some hurried, doubtful orders to his man, which that functionary consulted Mrs. Sutton

about without being able to make anything of them. Whether Mr. Trevelyan meant to leave the Hall that day, or to remain for an indefinite period, neither of them could decide, and the young squire did not linger to give any explanations. The servant made his mind easy by packing some of his master's things, and laying out others for immediate use, so that however the decision might prove to be, when that uncertain young potentate came back, he at least might not be capable of blame.

CHAPTER IX.

By Chance.

THE young squire occupied himself in a most unsatisfactory way all the afternoon. He kept walking about in utter restlessness and helplessness, altogether occupied by an unaccountable longing, yet unable to think of any means to gratify it. He was sufficiently experienced in the ways of the world to know that he ought to seize this moment to escape, and ought to be grateful to the blacksmith for a dismissal which, though it mortified him, saved him from any painful consciousness of having deceived or deluded the girl whom he could not prevent himself from loving. Thank Heaven, she would be spared any disappointment or vexation; but yet that was a cold comfort, and Roger strained his eyes to catch a possible glimpse of her, and conjured her pretty figure up in the distance a dozen times at least, as he wandered about the rougher

part of the common, where the flat surface was broken with innumerable heights and hollows. He had seen Agnes pass in that direction once or twice, during his acquaintance with her, going to see an old servant who lived some distance off. It was a forlorn hope, but still it was a hope. If she, too, felt dreary and surprised at the lack of the daily visitor, he thought it was not impossible that she might bethink herself of this distant pensioner; for Roger's vanity or feelings, or some clearer insight in him, made it impossible for him to believe that she would be altogether indifferent to his departure; and then he thought of her father's words, that they should save her from making any discovery. Yes, that was true, very true; but—might it not, perhaps, be better that they should for one exquisite moment know that they loved each other, and part, innocent young martyrs, conscious of the delight as well as the anguish, as that they should pine apart, always longing to know what was in each other's hearts? Young Trevelyan kept wandering up and down among the gorse bushes with these thoughts in his mind—often thinking, as he lifted his eye and his eyeglass in wistful inspection of the long stretch of vacant space open before him, that some solitary distant figure, which in one case turned out to be Mrs. Mumford, the laundress, and in

another a woman selling oranges, was Agnes; for the poor fellow's agitation did not help his imperfect vision. And so at last it happened that he had just turned from a long, searching, vain gaze in the direction of the village, and was dropping his eyeglass with a heavy sigh, when a sound almost too light for a footstep caught his anxious ear on the other side; and turning round he actually saw the figure for which he had been looking, and which seemed to his startled perceptions at this particular moment to have dropped from the skies.

Agnes was going home, with a little empty basket in her hand; she had taken that long walk to-day as he divined, but not because she missed his daily visit. Quite a different reason had moved the blacksmith's daughter; she had gone to be out of the way when the daily visitor came—half with a forlorn pride to show that she did not care, half with a maidenly wile that he might feel her absence. And the result was that Agnes knew nothing about her father's interview with Roger—nothing of the decision which had been come to—and so, totally unwarned and unguarded, fell at once, her heart beating with unexpected thrills of happiness, into the most dangerous way of temptation. Roger did not attempt to conceal the little start of

delighted surprise with which he hailed her appearance. He was by her side in a moment, crackling through the gorse-bushes. "I thought I should see you at last," he cried, out of the irrepressible emotion of his heart—"I knew I should find you here."

"Why?" said Agnes, with a little wonder; "I am not often here; but I suppose they told you at home," she said, after a moment's interval, with a slight faint flush of displeasure on her cheek.

"No," said Roger, walking on slowly, very slowly, by her side, and constraining her, according to the rules of "good manners" in which the blacksmith had brought up his child, to slacken her own steps; and then, after a pause, the young man added, "I am going away."

His voice sounded so blank and melancholy that an uninterested spectator might have laughed at its conscious pathos; but it was no laughing matter with poor Agnes. She felt giddy as she continued to go on, no longer seeing clearly where she was going. The light paled suddenly out of the evening atmosphere, and her heart sank in her breast. "Yes," said Agnes, and as soon as she could go on, "I heard you were going away."

"You heard?" said Roger, turning round to

look at her. He was wonderfully cheered and encouraged by the faint tones of her voice; and yet perhaps it meant only acquiescence in this banishment, to which everybody made up their minds so easily. "Agnes, do *you* bid me go like the rest?" said the troubled young man.

"I?" the poor girl faltered. "I have nothing to do with it, Mr. Trevelyan; it was because your father and your sister had come to the Hall. They said at home that you were not likely to come to us any more."

"But neither my father, nor my sister, nor anybody in the world, is half so much to me as you are," said young Trevelyan, who even forgot that he had his love to tell in the eagerness of his anxiety for an answer. "If it is for *your* peace or comfort I will go, though it kills me; but, Agnes, you must tell me yourself," said the excited youth; "I will not take it from anyone else. If I must go, it is you who must send me away."

"Oh, Mr. Trevelyan, hush! hush!" said Agnes; "you don't know what you are saying." *She* did not know, poor soul; her face had become utterly pale; her voice sank almost to a whisper; it was all she could do to keep from crying. And beside her was this face which she could not

help seeing, and which seemed to hang upon her decision. What had brought this mystery about? Wonder and a certain awe mingled with the exquisite sweet anguish in her heart. She did not think what was coming; only that the world was going to end—that he was going away. They had both strayed out of the path with their slow uncertain steps, and had got into the heart of the gorse, and paused there, not knowing why.

"Agnes," said the young squire again, with agitated breathless lips, "nobody else in the world can love you as I do. I would die before vexation or harm should come near you. I would guard you with my life; and why—why should *you* join with all the rest? I could be content with any kind of life if you would share it," said the young lover. He grew bolder as he saw how little prepared she was, and how confused and tremulous she stood before him. He took the shy maiden hand, which was too much startled by the sudden touch to know how to withdraw itself, and held it fast. "Agnes, you have not the heart to send me away?"

And then the blue eyes rose, which were full of depths unfathomable even to Roger's love. "How could you think it? It would be like—dying," she said, with a sudden fall in her voice, so that he could scarcely make out the sound of

the last word; but the sense was not difficult to realise. Then Agnes discovered what it was she had said. She drew herself away from him with a start of terror. "We should not speak so to each other," she said, in the first shock of perception—"not you and I. Oh, Mr. Trevelyan, I forgot—I did not think——;" and the tears, which would fain have come much sooner, ended the sentence in a confusion which was sweeter to Roger than the most coherent avowal of love.

And now it was his turn to speak, and he spoke, saying nothing very new—nothing that would bear repeating—words that most people have said or heard once in their lives; but they were as new to Agnes as they were to Eve, and if the Windholm common grew straightway into a garden of Eden around the two young souls, who could wonder? Of course it was the only natural result which such a chance meeting at such a moment could have had. Yet perhaps a touch of another world—a world after the Fall—thrilled through the young squire when he found himself nearing the village, after an hour or a minute, he could not tell which, of that climax of youthful delight, with Agnes's arm drawn through his own; but his companion knew nothing of the strange jar which ran through his very frame as if some sensitive nerve had been touched. She did

not know that he was going as directly in the face of prudence, and reason, and every wise suggestion, as of the chill but delicious breeze which had caught the breath of violets from the village-gardens, and swept over them as they went homeward. They were not talking much just then, but they were walking arm-in-arm, much to the confusion of Agnes, who would fain have kept apart as they came near the neighbours' houses. Roger held her reluctant hand tight, as if it were a protection to him, and when she insisted upon withdrawing it, some of his courage failed the young man. They were just coming in sight of the Green and of William Stanfield's windows, on which the setting sun burned with its brightest departing glow. "I have been here to-day before, and your father turned me away," said the young squire. Just then the gates of the Cedars swung open, and the carriage containing the three young ladies, all in full dinner costume, swept past the wayfarers. Roger took off his hat mechanically in reply to their salutations; but poor Agnes dropt aside, perceiving intuitively the keen look of wonder and indignation which all the three cast upon her. The blacksmith's daughter felt a certain bitterness gliding over her heart for the first time in her life. Then she, too, began to feel that she had returned to the world as it has

been since the Fall; yet there was something she could anchor on without any disquietude. "My father is coming to meet us," said Agnes, with a pang of new-born trouble and faith. Perhaps he might say this wonderful dream was to end, and slay the infant joy at a stroke; but at all events, though it might kill her, what he should decide could be nothing but just and right.

CHAPTER X.

The Blacksmith's Defeat.

IT was an awful moment for the triumphant lover. William Stanfield came forward with steady rapid steps, and with his eyes fixed upon the young squire. To see the two approaching together had struck a blow of actual physical anguish upon the blacksmith's heart. After all, had it not been possible to save his child—his woman-child, over whom his heart yearned? and yet the depths of silent tolerance and human sympathy that were in the man restrained the instinctive passion with which he looked upon the young disturber of his household peace. But there was not now a moment to be lost. His mind had been full of doubt and trouble all day. Could he not see in the averted face of his daughter that new commotion which for the first time in her life she wanted to hide from him? She had gone out without his knowledge, and much to the increase

of his anxiety; for, if the two young creatures met, who could prevent the inevitable catastrophe? So he went to meet them with something of the same silent haste with which he would have started to snatch his daughter from drowning or burning, and with a heavy weight at his heart.

As for Roger, it was all he could do to man himself for that interview. "Don't be frightened, darling," he said softly to Agnes; but in reality he was more frightened than she was. The blacksmith scarcely paused when he came up to them. He said to his daughter, "Go home, little one, I will come to you presently;" and laying his great hand on the young squire's arm, drew him away in the opposite direction. "You must come with me, Mr. Trevelyan. I must speak with you," he said, with a force totally irresistible, not leaving a moment for any word of parting. "I will come back, Agnes," said the young man, in a kind of despair, before he was swept away by the stronger tide of her father's will. All these strange proceedings were seen and noted by various eyes. The man at the Cedars, who was slowly closing the gate after the carriage, and who had thought the blacksmith's daughter not utterly above his own admiration, took in the whole scene with insolent astonishment, putting a

construction not unlike what Sir Roger Trevelyan might have done on that remarkable encounter. As for Agnes, she ran across the Green, trembling so that she could not trust herself to walk, in an agony of terror and trust, secret shame, and pride and anguish. Could it come to an end, that new-born immortal joy; and then what worth would life be afterwards? She fled to her room, and threw herself on her knees, and found there was no longer any power in her but of distracted, confused recollections, and fright and wonder. Oh, when would the suspense be over? When should she know what she had to endure?

"Mr. Trevelyan, you haven't been fair and honest with me—not as I had a right to expect," said the blacksmith. "You gave me your word, and I gave you my blessing. We parted friends," said the father, involuntarily becoming excited, "and yet I find you here again, stealing back to my house. I did not forbid you my house, because I trusted your word. You've been speaking things to the child that she never should have heard. You have broken our compact that was on your honour. Young man, it's best not to make any answer. When a man thinks he's being trifled with, it's hard work keeping his temper. I've a right now to ask you to go away."

"No, Stanfield—everything is changed. Let

me tell you how it is. I was coming to see you—" cried Roger.

"I'll have no talking," said the indignant father—"no talking. If you tell me you've stolen my child's peace, it'll be an ill hearing for one of us. I've but one thing to ask of you, Mr. Trevelyan; and, if you're a man of honour, and a gentleman, as I took you for, you'll do it without another word: it is to go out of this place to-night, and never, as long as she's in Windholm, to enter it more."

"And I tell you, Stanfield," cried the young man, fired by his words, "that, as I am a gentleman and a man of honour, I will not go; and that wherever Agnes is, is my place, and I will not leave it unless I carry her with me. Hear me out. I mean——"

"Young man," said the powerful blacksmith, laying his hand upon Roger's slight shoulder, "it don't matter to me what you mean. Honour! You've done it, then, have you? I have it in my heart to curse you, you bit of a lad! Had you no manhood in you, to put a force on yourself and save the child? Love! that's what such as *you* call love. Good Lord! I'd have tied myself up with ropes—I'd have rent myself in twain afore I'd have done it. And now you dare to face her father, boy! God preserve me that I don't

lay hands on you. She's my ewe lamb, that I've nourished in my bosom. I don't care nothing what happens in the world, as long as my little girl's safe. And you had the heart, for an hour's pleasure——"

"Stanfield! what do you suppose I've done?" said the startled youth.

This question roused a flash of fury in the broad brown eyes.

"Done!" said Stanfield, with a kind of suppressed lion's roar of resentment and indignation, "done! what could ye do? Do you think you could stain the sky with your breath? but you've done as much harm as you're capable of, all the same." He added, after a moment's pause, "You're the squire, Mr. Trevelyan, but you're none of my child's equal, think of yourself what you will."

"No," said Roger, with the humility of young love, "no—I never thought I was."

The blacksmith was mollified in spite of himself.

"And yet you've made the waters bitter that were sweet," he said, with unconscious pathos. "You've woke up the child's heart, and troubled her life. Did it never come into your head that a man might deny himself to save a young creature that knew nothing o' the world? It's play to you; but when she wakes up to find the difference——"

Stanfield paused, overcome by the bitterness of his own thoughts.

"It's no play to me," said young Trevelyan, breaking in eagerly. "You will not let me speak. Stanfield, I am a man—I am not a boy. I have a right to guide my own actions. Agnes —yes, I have a right to call her so, and I will— Agnes loves me," said the young man, involuntarily speaking low, and betraying the sweetness of the words by the sudden flush of happy consciousness over his face. "She has promised to be my wife. Why should you separate us, and destroy the happiness of your own child? You don't love her as I do, Stanfield; you can't, it's impossible! I would give my life for her——"

"I don't love her as you do?" said the blacksmith, with a half gasp of bitter amusement— "no; you're in the right there, Mr. Trevelyan. I love her a hundred and a thousand times better, boy, being her father, than a score like you. You would give your life for her? It's easy talking. You would not give up your will for her, which was what I asked of you. Do it now, and I'll forgive you all she has to suffer by your means. She's but young; she'll get over it. Think," said Stanfield, with stern emphasis, "of your father, your rank, your friends! You're a gentleman, and the heir of a great property; and,

in the eye of the world, the blacksmith's daughter of Windholm, is no wife for you. You might give her your word and mean it," continued the blacksmith, not without a certain loftiness, as of a man addressing his inferior, as he looked down from his greater height upon the agitated youth before him, "yet who could say, when you went away and came under other influence, that you could keep it, Mr. Trevelyan, even meaning your best? No—you were tempted, and you've fallen, contrary to what you said to me this morning. I'll forgive you all you've done, if you'll take heart now, and go away."

"Take heart?" said Roger. "You treat me as if I were a fool or a blackguard, Stanfield. You would as soon persuade me to shoot myself here where I am standing as to go away. I am going back to Agnes. Why are you so hard upon us? If she is willing, what have you to say against me? I have never betrayed man nor woman," said the young man, with a little emotion. "I have been false to no one, so far as I am aware; but you speak to me as if I were proved to be a scoundrel. Such as I am, your daughter has chosen me; and I will not leave Windholm, not if the Queen ordered me, not for a hundred fathers—for nobody in the world," said the young man, impetuously, "but Agnes herself; and she will not send me away."

There was a momentary pause; for the young passion was too genuine and manful not to have its effect upon so true a man as Stanfield. He recognised its reality in spite of himself. In that moment the two changed characters, and Roger gained a temporary advantage. He turned round with steady determination to go back again.

"If you have nothing more to say to me, I will go back to Agnes," he said, looking full in the blacksmith's troubled face. "She and I have but one interest henceforward, and you know she will be anxious. Be kind to her," cried Roger, involuntarily. "Don't go back with a gloomy countenance to destroy her happiness; don't put distrust in her heart. She honours you above all the world," said the young man, with a softened tone, "and — she loves me."

It was a sound like a great sob that came out of Stanfield's heart. To be told thus that he was to be kind to his child—the apple of his eye—to hear this stranger boy assert his right to her, and plead for her father's forbearance towards his darling! A tempest of mingled passion shook the very soul of the strong man. Fury, sympathy, desolateness, a yearning to be with his daughter, a terrible sense of loss struck to his

heart. Between the impulse of doing a violence to the intruder beside him, and giving him his hand in reluctant but solemn amity, his spirit was divided within him. To these conflicting feelings he gave no expression, except in that sob or groan, and in the moisture, wrung by intensity of pain, which came to his eyes, unseen in the twilight. For the candid soul could not deny its own nature—could not but confess that the youth had responded gallantly and like a man, nor abjure the strong belief in Love and Truth which lay at the bottom of his creed. He could not do it. He turned back with a heavy heart by Roger's side. Not even the weight of troublous thoughts that oppressed him, could make an infidel of the loyal heart which had no understanding of falsehood. He made no profession of cordiality, or change of opinion; he said only—"I will go back with you," and, subduing himself, went.

They walked back together in the slowly-falling darkness, the father's thoughts all sublime in their very trouble, faithful to faith, notwithstanding the unexpressed and inexpressible doubt and presentiment within him; the lover again feeling, now and then, even as he hastened towards his love, that jar of strange consciousness which had moved him before he parted with her. Roger had won the day; but even in the

exaltation of his triumph, the young man could not shut his eyes to the step he was taking. Thus they went back, visible from the window, where Agnes watched with a beating heart. She did not see the ghosts that stalked after them through the twilight, and the sight of the two returning together gave perfection to her dream of blessedness. Now, indeed, for the first time, it began to be apparent to her that the wonderful vision was true.

CHAPTER XI.

Plighting Troth.

"MASTER," said the blacksmith's wife, bursting into the forge in all the flush of her high-coloured and excitable beauty—"he's come back. I thought you had took advice for once, and sent the young squire, as isn't a visitor for a house like ours, away. But he's come in, though it's so late; and you—master, it's seldom as you're to be seen here at this hour of the night."

"Very seldom, Sally," said William Stanfield, out of the gloom. He had come into the empty forge, where the evening light had faded almost into complete darkness, when Roger Trevelyan rushed upstairs—and was seated on a rude stool, leaning his head upon his hands. It was a moment of defeat for the strong and true man, and he had paused to master himself before he came into the light.

"Seldom! you take it easy, master—you take

it easy!" cried his uncongenial mate, who was excited out of her usual deference. "Do you think what's to come of it, and you sitting by and taking no notice? I did think as you had took advice; but there's young Roger by your girl's side, a-stealing of her wits away with his talk. It'll end in shame—it can't end in nothing but shame; and how will you ever hold up your head, master——"

"Stop there," said the blacksmith, rising and coming forward into the faint grey light in which the excited woman stood. "It's not my part to be hard upon you, even if you can't understand; but I'm just a man like the rest; I may say what I'll be sorry for, if you repeat that word again. No, Sally," he continued, sadly, leaning his hand upon her shoulder, with a vague yearning for sympathy which startled the woman—"shame doesn't come natural to me nor mine; it's because you don't understand. I thought my Agnes was as the angels, and I was a fool to think it. The angels are none fit for this world Sally; and a woman, though she be the purest thing in God's creation——"

"Don't, master," said Mrs. Stanfield, with a little start, as if he had hurt her. He took his arm away with a momentary wistful disappointed look, and then relapsing into his own thoughts,

began to walk up and down the darksome breadth of the smithy. The shutter was up upon the large open unglazed window, and the light, such light as there was—the chill grey twilight of the March evening—came in at the open door, making a centre to the blackness in which the two figures might be dimly discerned. Outside, the yard was quite dark and silent, swept by one level line of light from the archway, which shone clear across to the smithy door—and showing the white outer stair of the blacksmith's house in the distance, and above it an inquisitive candle at the little window, peeping out like a curious spectator into the darkness below.

"Though she be the purest thing in God's creation," continued the blacksmith, arguing out his tender argument with himself, "though she's of the kind that queens might be made of, if queens went by right and merit—though she's innocent as a babe, and fair as a flower—though a man can see no harm nor ill that could come nigh her;" he was walking up and down the dark forge, crossing now and then the stream of grey light from the doorway before his wondering wife, who looked on in total incomprehension, saying the words over softly to himself; "but the end of it is," he continued, with a change of tone which sounded strange to her ears in the darkness,

through which she could not see his face, "the end of it all, Sally," he said, with a kind of mournful humour, coming up to her, and again laying his hand on her shoulder, "is, that being my child, she can't be an angel, and that marrying and giving in marriage, is the way of this world."

"Marriage!" cried Mrs. Stanfield, with a little scream, "marriage! and do you mean to tell me, master, as Mr. Roger—Lord, he's deceiving of you—good Lord, he's a-taking of you in! it ain't a thing as could be done among the Trevelyans. Oh, master, you know a deal more things than I do; you're a—a deal better than I am," cried the woman, with a stifled sob; "but you don't know the wickedness that's in this world; Sir Roger would see his son dead and buried before——"

"Sons have wills o' their own, Sally," said the blacksmith; "and a bit of a lad might have his own objections, in reason, to being dead and buried. I'm going in now, for I have something more to say to the boy to-night."

"But, master—you don't mean for to tell me as he's agoing to marry your girl—not Agnes? I'd believe a deal if you'd say it; but to marry Agnes? Master, he's a deceiving of you—it can't come true!" said Mrs. Stanfield, with a

mixture of wonder, scorn, and offence which was strange to see.

The blacksmith made no immediate answer; he closed the heavy door behind her as she came out, and locked it with the great key. "It's not your fault that you can't understand," he said, with something between a sigh and a groan. "Ay, she's going to marry him; it's little pleasure to me. He's no more like my girl than ——But never mind, it's all Greek and Latin to you, Sally," continued William Stanfield, with again a softening in his voice. He was touched with what seemed to him the motherly anxiety of his wife. True, she could not understand; but in her way she meant to guard his girl, and he could not allow that kindness to pass without gratitude, troubled as he was.

"Not like the girl!" exclaimed the amazed wife, but with suppressed tones—"not like the girl—and he a Trevelyan! Not good enough for her! Oh, Lord!" Mrs. Stanfield followed her husband up the outer stair, her face looking flushed and heated in the blinking light of that inquisitive candle in the little window. The window was slightly open, and the cold air puffed the little flame about, and threw flickering uncertain lights upon the master and mistress of the house as they ascended the stair. Stanfield went first,

for the natural courtesy of the man, profound as it was, was scarcely of the kind to overcome the usual habits of his class, or to rouse him up from his preoccupation to let his wife pass. He paused when he had reached the door and turned back upon her. "Sally, don't speak to trouble the child's mind," said the blacksmith; "*you've* seen the bad side of the world, poor thing; but she knows nought of that; you've a good meaning, but you don't understand her nor me."

Mrs. Stanfield tossed her head with an ominous movement. "Master, you're wise," she said, with some bitterness, "you and your girl—I don't pretend to be as great a scholard as her nor you; but if she comes to harm, you'll think on my words. I don't know what she is, that things should happen different to other folks. No, I'll not say nothing. No, Stanfield, there ain't no occasion for blazing up upon me with your two eyes. I've cleared my conscience—I haven't seen the girl agoing to her ruin and kep' it to myself; you've my warning, whatever happens. But I won't say no more, nor interfere with what's no business o' mine. If it had been my girl, I'd have done different; but I'm one as can do what I'm told and hold my tongue. You shan't hear no more from me."

The blacksmith looked at her with compassionate, impatient eyes. She stood on the

threshold, the full-formed, warm-coloured, high-tempered creature, in her overblown beauty, glowing with a superficial flush of passion, to the origin of which he, gazing at her with the involuntary impatience of a pure mind brought in contact with the lower sphere of intellect, which does not comprehend purity, had no clue. He drew a quick breath, and resigned himself with a sigh.

"I wish you understood, Sally—but it's all heathen Greek to you," said the man, whose tender human toleration perceived and pitied her disability even while it disturbed him; and he went on to the closed door of the parlour, leaving her behind with the flickering candle, which stood peering out into the night. As for Mrs. Stanfield, she laid her plump flushed hand upon her ample bosom, within which her heart was beating loudly, and shook the other dimpled fist in the air. "What is she, I wonder, that she should be different from other folks?" she breathed half aloud in a fiery breath of disdain and passion, and then a few hasty tears swept out of her fiery hazel eyes. Perhaps they relieved her mind a little. "But I hadn't no good father to take care of me," she said to herself as she put down the window; and after a pause, wiping off the tears, followed with female curiosity into the parlour, from which

Agnes had hastily glided to bring lights. The girl was thankful to escape at that trying moment, for she was the only one of the party who divined her father's deep disappointment, and its visionary yet real causes. She went to light the lamp and bring it in, finding some comfort in that simple office—for she was still only William Stanfield's daughter, used to domestic ministrations, though the young squire had chosen her for his bride.

When Mrs. Stanfield went in, the two men were by themselves in the dark parlour. There was still a kind of twilight there, for the blinds had been drawn up from the two windows, and the cold March evening sky, with a clear break of windy chilly blue, opening up the dark clouds in the western distance, looked full in upon their indistinct figures. The blacksmith had seated himself in his usual easy-chair near the fire, where he sat silent waiting for the lamp, while Roger stood by the window, unconsciously watching in his excitement the moving figures on the village green, and the twinkles of light in the windows of the Cedars, which were glimmering through the opposite trees. The young man was tingling with happiness and delight, yet moved by strange thrills of self-consciousness and pain; he was less at his ease now than ever he had been before; and

unawares and suddenly, by some strange spell, his eyes had been opened and his ear became sensitive to every mark of the social difference between the blacksmith's house and his own natural home.

"Where is Agnes?" said Mrs. Stanfield, coming in. "If there is anything going on between her and Mr. Trevelyan—as I can't believe my ears as it can be true—you might have had the thought, master, to ring the bell for Martha. It ain't becoming to one as is considered a match for Mr. Roger to go to the kitchen for the lamp like a common sort of a girl. Not as it's much o' the work of this house goes through her hands; but still, master, if you'd leave these things to a woman, it ain't afore Mr. Roger that I'd send her on such errands; but you men, though you may be wise, there's a deal o' things as show you can never learn."

This speech thrilled Roger Trevelyan through and through as he stood by the window. It was well for him he was in the dark, which did not show the fluctuations of his colour, the changes of his face. To think that this woman had any right to comment on the acts of his Agnes, or to discuss the new bond formed between them! Up to this night Roger had laughed at Mrs. Stanfield, and chatted with her in the freest and most friendly way. Now it occurred to him, like a

sudden horror, that she was going to be his relation—his mother-in-law. The shock was indescribable. He shrank into the corner of the window, and looked out more and more fixedly at the moving lights in the Cedars. Perhaps matters would not have been much better if he had gone on his wooing there.

"Let us alone, Sally," said the blacksmith's voice through the darkness; but his wife was excited, and continued to chatter on—

"She's not been brought up as I approve of, Mr. Roger, hasn't Agnes; but it ain't for me to make light of the master's daughter afore him and you, if so be as you have set your fancy upon her, which is a wonder to me. The master there, he's put out because I'm speaking so free; but I always did speak my mind free. She's a good girl, Mr. Trevelyan, though we do have words now and again; and a pretty girl, for them as likes that kind of looks—though I never was much of a one for the pale sort myself. I am sure I wish you well, and it's a great honour. I've seen more of the world than the master has, and I know what a great honour it is. It is the finest match I ever heard of, and a terrible rise in the world for a girl like Agnes. You'll have to put up with a deal, both from your own family and from seeing her backward in your fine ways——"

At this moment Agnes entered the room with the lamp.

It was a humble function enough, but it did not misbecome her. She came in, with the light throwing a special rose-radiance on her beautiful young face, all glorified and exalted with happiness. A delicate changing colour went and came upon the soft cheek which was usually so pale; her lips were a little parted with the quick breath of emotion; her eyes gave one wistful inquiring glance out of their dark-blue depths of silence, as she came into the room. She knew they were all looking at her, but—at that moment so strangely different from all the previous passages of her life, that moment of strange exaltation, in which life seemed all at once to have become perfect and raised above all vulgar circumstances—she, too, had surmounted the shyness of her youth. She looked round upon them with a tremulous smile of unspeakable trust and confidence. Mrs. Stanfield's words were stayed on her lips by Agnes's look; she dared no more have continued to speak than if that fair young face, all radiant in the pathos and inspiration of joy, had been the face of an angel. By way of concealing her discomfiture, she went to the windows to draw down the blinds, turning her back upon the girl, upon whom the other two were

gazing with a half-adoring admiration. As for Roger Trevelyan, he could have thrown himself at the feet of the lovely stooping figure which paused for a moment by the table, after setting down the lamp, in a strange but sweet confusion. She did not know what to do next; she could not go and get her work as usual, and sit down to her ordinary evening occupation. The world was a new world since the morning to Agnes: she stood in the circle of the lamp-light, stooping her head, casting down her eyes, waiting for somebody to speak. She knew that neither of the two who were gazing at her could see fault or blemish in anything she did. Such a heavenly sense of being loved and believed in is scarcely possible except to youth. She stood in the light of their eyes with a conscious perfection of happiness, unwilling to break the charm.

Then the blacksmith took the conduct of affairs into his own hands. He came and stood beside her, and took the two small hands, which were becoming a little nervous and restless, into his own. "Patience, little one," he said, tenderly; "I have something to say yet. Mr. Trevelyan, come here—I have something to say to you. We've had more talk to-day than I ever thought to have had with you. It's none of my choosing, and I don't pretend to say that it's a pleasure to

me; no, little one," said the blacksmith—looking tenderly at Agnes, who had pressed his hand in remonstrance, unable to tolerate anything less than his full sympathy, and shaking his head; "no, child. It would be little pleasure, Heaven knows, to give you away to any man on the face of the earth—and it's harder now to think my child may be far from welcome where she goes. Young man, I'm meaning no slight to you, but she has been the light of the house, the desire of the eyes——"

"And so will she be to me," cried Roger, eagerly. He could not take her hand, because her father held them both fast, but he touched the soft grey folds of her wide sleeve and caressed it, softly drawing it into his hand. And she, who had been standing with downcast eyes listening to her father, turned with a half-conscious involuntary movement towards the youth, and cast a timid glance at him from under her eyelashes; the motion, slight as it was, went to the blacksmith's heart.

"Well, well," he said, with a sigh of patient impatience; "well, well—you believe it, and so must I. The end of it all is that she has made her choice and I can't say her nay. I never said her nay, that I can remember, not all her life. But, Roger Trevelyan, think well what you're about. It is not for nothing *she* spoke," said

the blacksmith, indicating his wife with a nod of his head. "She knows the dark side of the world a bit, though she don't understand. You're Sir Roger's heir, and this little one here is but *my* child. I don't count you her equal, young man," said William Stanfield, towering over both the young figures before him in natural grandeur, and fixing the full light of his eyes upon the young squire. "I speak the truth—I don't count you her equal; but other folks will have other notions, and she is but *my* child, and you are Sir Roger's heir."

"Stanfield, give me her hand," said young Trevelyan; "she is your child, but she is my love; you can't keep us separate—you would not, for you are a kind father. What can I say more than I have said? She is mine—give her to me."

And the two little hands stirred in the father's close grasp, moving as with an impulse of releasing themselves. The blacksmith was not more magnanimous than nature. The little involuntary movement once more smote him like a blow. He unclasped his fingers tenderly and stroked and patted the two small hands which lay covered over each other on his large brown palm. "I have let the doves free," he said, with the pathetic simple smile habitual to him. The next moment there was but one, clasping, cling-

ing to his—the other was in Roger Trevelyan's grasp, covered with his kisses. The strong man was overpowered by the sight. Between the hot and fiery impulse to cast this intruder off who came between him and his child, and the sorrowful tender patience which knew it must be so, his strength of mind forsook him. It was more because he could no longer bear it and restrain his feelings than from any other motive, that he took his wife, who was burning to speak, out of the room, with a look that awed her into silence. Mrs. Stanfield was most reluctant to go. She could not give up the idea of bringing them to their senses, as she said, by her own interference. She had been waiting an opportunity to utter the words with which she was bursting, but she dared not stay nor speak in direct opposition to the master. She made up for it by bursting forth, as soon as she was outside the door——

"He should be made to sign a paper, or something. Master, there's something as ought to be done, if you were in your senses!" cried the excited woman. "What's the meaning of trusting a young gentleman like that, as if he was her own rank in life, and was getting a great catch in the blacksmith's daughter, as is known to be well to do? Master, some time or other,

you'll think upon my words. He ought to be made to sign a paper, swearing as he'll marry her——"

"Woman!" cried the blacksmith, goaded beyond bearing, "if he would leave her and never come near us more, I would thank God. He's no more equal to my child—— But God forgive me, why should I be angry? Is it her fault if she can't understand?" said the tolerant, compassionate soul. "I have enough to bear, to-night, Sally, my poor dear," he went on, laying a pitying hand on her arm. "It's the evil of this world you've seen, and not the good, and you don't understand. Don't speak nor vex me any more."

And it was Stanfield himself, a few minutes after, who dismissed the unwilling lover. The woman who "did not understand" appeared no more to disturb the happiness and the trouble of that night.

CHAPTER XII.

How the News was Told.

NEXT morning Mrs. Stanfield took an early opportunity of returning to her own room immediately after breakfast. This was not to facilitate the meeting of Agnes and Roger, for that the blacksmith had forbidden until Sir Roger Trevelyan had been informed of the engagement, at which ungracious task the poor young squire was labouring in the library of the Hall with very mingled feelings, unable to refuse obedience to Stanfield's stronger will, and equally unable to invent any kind of suitable words in which to convey information so startling to his father. Roger was in no joyous frame of mind, under these circumstances. If he could but have seen Agnes, and spent the long bright spring morning by her side, as he had expected, the youth, in the intoxication of his love and happiness, would have forgotten everything; but it was very different to be caged up here and to have to

write the most unpalatable news in the world to Sir Roger, to whom it was horrible to him, after all that had occurred, so much as to name Agnes's name. He sat biting his pen with the glummest countenance, thinking, in spite of himself, what should he do? and of having Mrs. Stanfield for a mother-in-law, and all kinds of horrors. These thoughts were all the more persistent that he hated himself for them, and did all he could to keep them out of his head. If he could but have carried her off, taken her away to the end of the world, where nobody could have any right in her but himself only!—and then Roger's heart smote him to think of her father and his exceeding love. But fathers, and mothers, and relations in general, are, it must be owned, often enough much in a lover's way. If they could but be abolished and got done with, as soon as the lord and prince appears who is doomed to be the master of the maiden's destinies! but, unfortunately, natural affection, and various worldly necessities to boot, stand in the way of that. Anyone, however, who can realize poor Roger Trevelyan's position, will understand he had very sorry companions in the shape of thoughts that morning in the Hall library. He made no speed with his letter; he hated the task; he could find no words in which to express

what he was thus to be compelled to say. Finally, he gave up trying, and ordered his horse, and rode off to Slough, which was several miles nearer London than Windholm, to get a bouquet for his love. Agnes had never even seen such flowers as those which he selected himself with a lover's care, going anxiously through the conservatories after the gardener, who told him all the fine Latin titles, name and surname, which the young squire neither heard nor cared for. But meanwhile Sir Roger Trevelyan was getting the necessary information in quite a different way.

Mrs. Stanfield had retired to her own room immediately after breakfast; she was not in an amiable condition; perhaps, because she had been subdued and compelled to keep silence on the previous night. Her hazel eyes were fiery, shining with red glances, and the high colour burned higher than ever in her heated cheeks. It was upon Agnes, however, and not upon her husband, that these strange looks of indignation and injury were cast. An air of resentment was in her whole manner to the unconscious girl, who, to tell the truth, being occupied with happier thoughts, never found it out. When the blacksmith went out after breakfast, his wife betook herself upstairs. She closed and, indeed, locked her door, that she might not be disturbed, and

got out an odd old-fashioned blotting-book from the depths of an old box, one of her few original possessions, which always stood in her room, and was always locked, to Martha's great curiosity. Mrs. Stanfield's capacious bosom heaved as she bent over this book; one or two scalding tears dropped over her hot cheeks. "Oh, Lord! if the master was ever to know," she murmured to herself, as she opened it—and then closed it again over her plump hand, and cast a scared look round the comfortable, orderly apartment of which her husband had made her mistress. To risk all this solid comfort and enjoyment for the gratification of a sentiment, of a passion, was a thing over which she might well pause; but she never had denied herself her own way, and did not know how to begin now. She opened the book again and arranged her paper, and took up a pen. It was not a kind of exertion to which she was accustomed; she leaned half her person over the table, and painted her letters heavily with the broad nib, and used a great deal of ink; her thoughts went so much faster than her hand, that, by way of relief, she uttered them partly aloud—"Who is she, I would like to know, as everything is to be made easy for?" she said to herself; "who made her different from other folks?" This the excited woman repeated in one form or another when-

ever she paused in her laborious work. "There was none as tried to save me; and who is she as should be used different?" It was at least an hour before the letter on which she bestowed so much pains was finished. When she took it up at last in her inked fingers to go over it, this is what Mrs. Stanfield read:—

"Them as might have a good rite to write to Sir Roger Trevelyan if they was to give their name —but as made up their mind never to trubble him more but for his own good—makes bold to rite for to say as mischeef's going on with the young squire. He's a-being hooked in to marry a tradesman's girl rite or wrong. If Sir Roger Trevelyan means to putt a stopp to it he had best get the young gentleman took away; for he's in hands as wont lett him go. He'll be married before he knows where he iss, if them as belongs to him don't interfere.—From one as iss a well-wisher, and wouldn't stand by and see a Trevelyan get into trubble for the sake of Hold Times."

It was strange to see the eager, flushed looks with which the blacksmith's wife bent over this letter, and read it over again and again. She was troubled about the blots, of which there were two or three, and went over it to dot all the i's,

with a curious perseverance. When it was done, she looked at it admiringly. "If it was ever to come into his head as *I* wrote it!" she said to herself; "and, oh Lord, what would the master say?" Once more she looked round upon William Stanfield's comfortable room. If the blacksmith should ever find out who she was, what she was! but though she trembled at the thought, it brought a thrill of not unpleasant excitement to the uncontrollable creature, who was a wanderer at heart. If he should cast her out, she had still the world and adventure before her. Then she put up the letter, and put on her bonnet to take it to the post-office. She dared not trust it even to Oliver, the 'prentice-boy, who was much in her interest. She went away without going into the parlour, where Agnes sat over her work in a sweet haze of dreams. Mrs. Stanfield was excited; her breath came fast, her colour was higher than ever. She went to the butcher's and the baker's, and engaged in various agitated scraps of chat by way of arriving at the post-office unobserved. When she had fairly delivered herself of the important epistle, and deposited it in the letter-box, she breathed freer; but shrank into herself, and almost grew pale, and felt for the first time in her life as if she would faint, when turning round, she sud-

denly, without any preparation, encountered her husband with his eyes full upon her, standing at the post-office door. She uttered a little cry in her surprise and horror, and for the first moment was inclined to fall down on her knees and confess what she had done.

"I'm a strange sight to see out in the village at this time o' day," said the blacksmith, smiling. "I've come about business, Sally; and so have you, it appears. I never heard of your writing a letter before; why didn't you tell me, and I'd have done it for you? for I suppose it's to Tom and Roger. Roger! that's odd; I never thought of it before; your boy is the same name as the young squire."

"It ain't to call an uncommon name," said Mrs. Stanfield, with agitation. "He was called for his—grandfather, he was; there's been Rogers in *his* father's family since afore—afore Mr. Roger Trevelyan was born or thought of; you've been so took up with your own affairs, master, as I couldn't speak to you about my boys; and a mother as has lads at sea——"

She was not used to deception, to do her justice, and would have been in some trouble how to conclude, but for the kindly interruption of the good man, who thought no evil.

"I'm glad to hear you've been thinking of

the poor boys, Sally; a word from a mother does lads good," said the blacksmith. "I'm going on to the Vicarage to see after something that's wanted there; and I mustn't stay talking as if I couldn't talk at home. I'll be back to dinner; and I hope you'll look to the child a little, and keep up her heart. Being excited yesterday, she might droop if she wasn't looked to to-day."

Mrs. Stanfield heaved some troubled sighs when her husband disappeared—sighs of fright, and agitation, and relief. "But *he* didn't see nothing particular in my looks," she said to herself, smoothing down her plumage like a ruffled pigeon, with satisfaction, yet bitterness; "the child is all he thinks on;" and then she turned with a lightened mind to go home. Before she reached home, however, she met a neighbour, who stopped to speak to her. The blacksmith's wife was not popular in Windholm among the other respectable wives who were her neighbours. They were shy of her, nobody could have explained why, obeying an instinct; but there was one who appreciated so good a customer, and so ready a talker: this was the dressmaker who worked for all the respectable tradespeople, a widow, whose name was Pomplin, in whose workroom all the gossip of the place originated. It was Mrs. Pomplin's sallow, sharp face, which

now paused to look into the roseate and agitated countenance of the blacksmith's wife.

"Bless me! you look in a way," said the quick observer; "what's happened? I meant to have sent a young person up to-day to tell you of some lovely new patterns that have just arrived. My spring box came this morning, and there's a sweet bonnet as is just your style; but I hope there's no bad news come, for you do seem in a way."

"Oh no, M'm, no *bad* news," said Mrs. Stanfield—"things may put one out, without being bad news, as you know, as has had a family as well as me."

"I daresay," said the dressmaker, taking up the challenge readily. "Yes, there's been a deal of talk in the village about the goings-on at your house. Most folks seems surprised, Mrs. Stanfield, as you don't put a stop to it. I don't speak as giving my own opinion, for I'm one as hears all and says nothing—but folks *will* talk; and most persons seems to think that it's a pity to let the young squire come so much about, when there's a young girl in the house."

"It shouldn't be if I had my way," said Mrs. Stanfield—"but it's hard work to meddle between a father and a grown-up daughter. Little children don't count; but when they're grown

up—— I have a feeling for the master, too, for I'm not one as would put up with other folks interfering between me and my own flesh and blood—so I do as I would be done by. If anybody was to meddle between me and my girl, as is at a boarding-school, a deal too fine for the likes of me——"

"By-the-bye, is she likely to come to Windholm? It would be civil of Mr. Stanfield to ask her for the holidays," said Mrs. Pomplin, with sharp interest.

"Lord, as if they'd let her come!" said Mrs. Stanfield. "Why, bless you, she's with her father's friends—they've adopted her, they have; but as I wouldn't stand no interference between her and me, so I wouldn't be the one to meddle between the master and his girl—though I don't say as I haven't my own thoughts all the same."

"It's only natural you should," said the dressmaker; "Mr. Stanfield is the best of men, but I can't say as I ever thought he was judicious about Agnes; she's not been brought up like her rank in life. Them as are mothers themselves can see the difference; and she's just the one to make it dangerous, you know;" and here the village gossip nodded her head a good many times, and looked sadly yet triumphantly wise.

"That's just what I am always a-saying—but I

don't see that it makes no difference," said Mrs. Stanfield. "She's just the one to take things in her head—and it's easy for a girl at the best of times to make up her mind as she's going to be a fine lady, when a gentleman takes any kind of notice of her. It's my hope it'll all come to a good end, but there's none as can say. As for marrying——"

"Marrying! you don't mean to say as it's gone that length?" said Mrs. Pomplin.

"I can't say as it hasn't," said the blacksmith's wife—"but I always have my doubts of a gentleman marrying, unless he's so placed as he can't draw back; but Lord, if he knew as I was gabbling like this, what would the master say? I've got the dinner to see to, but I'll come in and look at the bonnet before tea. Don't say to a soul as I spoke about marrying. If it was to come to the ears of the folks in the village, I would have no comfort of my life."

"You may rely upon me," said Mrs. Pomplin, and she went away with some new ideas to communicate, which made the inspection of the box of fashions a doubly interesting event. Roger Trevelyan's visits to the blacksmith's house had been exciting enough; but marriage! All Windholm rang with the information before night.

Notwithstanding this double betrayal, Mrs.

Stanfield, after occupying herself very energetically about the dinner, and accounting for her more than ordinary flush by the fact that she had prepared part of it with her own hands, met her husband and his daughter without much discomposure at the common table. There was not a great deal of conversation there, for Agnes was naturally rapt in her own thoughts, and the blacksmith was more than ever preoccupied. He had taken advantage of his visit to the Vicarage to inform the Vicar of what had occurred, to the exceeding amazement of that spiritual authority. The Vicar, though odd and not very orthodox and very much Stanfield's friend, had not been able to conceal his surprise. "Sir Roger ought to be informed," he said. "I have just put a letter in the post to Sir Roger," replied the blacksmith, who could not at the same time divest himself of a certain glow of surprised resentment—for William Stanfield did not understand being, even for the moment, disapproved of; it was a novel sensation to him: so he was not much disposed to talk at dinner, not having quite recovered that disagreeable surprise. More and more undesirable, as he thought of it, became this connexion. If the blacksmith could but have divined that the young squire in his solitude that morning had felt all the secondary disadvantages

almost as painfully as he himself did, the father of Agnes would have discarded the young man with a contempt which would have given him some consolation. But he did not know; he only looked with a regretful tenderness on his child, and said to himself that at least she was happy, and that the young fellow loved her—and so went out to his usual work with a sore and heavy heart.

As for Agnes, those concealed waves of trouble that swelled round her had not reached the fairy pinnace in which she and her hopes and her happiness were embarked. She was still in the absolute stage of existence. Slow as her father was to believe in falsehood, was this young soul to understand unkindness. She knew what love was, but she did not comprehend the reverse of love, nor did it enter into her imagination to conceive how, having Roger's heart, she could want anything more to be happy. When her bouquet came that afternoon, with a precious note—her first love-letter—the innocent young heart swelled with an indescribable delight. She could as soon have thought of any impossibility on earth as dreamt that Roger had escaped from a great many troublesome and troubled thoughts about the future, by dashing a dozen miles over the country, in the teeth of an east wind, to get her that bouquet. There was time enough and to spare

to find out these hidden shadows which environed her. In the meantime, she was at the one unique period of existence when the woman is more happy than the man in the relations between them. Even when she thought with a vague awe of Miss Trevelyan, and imagined to herself the tender appeal she would make to the affections of that unknown sister, the real cloud on her horizon did not impress Agnes; the difficulties of living, the incompatibility of his surroundings and hers did not occur to her. She would have known a great deal better about it had she been a Miss Fox, of the Cedars—but being only the blacksmith's daughter, the conventional difficulties disturbed her not. Her own world was pure prose, she knew; but the new world—Roger's world—was the world of poetry, where life floated on angels' wings, where people lived as in books, where the pure and true were recognised by instinct. Her meditative soul was in that other sphere of which she dreamed—it never had lived among the bakers, and butchers, and tradespeople of Windholm. She might be a little doubtful of her "manners" just at first, but of herself Agnes could not be doubtful. "The burden of an honour unto which she was not born," did not oppress a mind which took little thought of the external circumstances of that elevation. "Her

gentle mind was such, that she grew a noble lady," would have been the truer prognostication; and she was as happy as a girl can be who is truly loved, and who anticipates nothing in this world—having met with nothing in her brief experience—but love and truth. So when the blacksmith retired, heavy and sore at heart, to the forge, seeing nothing but harm that was to result from the new relationship to which he had yielded so unwillingly; when Roger returned from his ride, more and more unwilling to write that letter to his father, and more and more aware of all the difficulties in his way; when even Mrs. Stanfield retired to her bedroom to lie down and get rid of her heightened colour and something which she called a palpitation, brought about by excitement; the young creature most involved spent the long, silent March afternoon in a haze of happiness, with her flowers beside her on the table, and the note, in which Roger called her his own, seldom out of her hands. She expected to be yet happier, more blessed than now, and so, all unwitting, passed through the sweetest hour of her life.

CHAPTER XIII.

How it was Received.

MISS TREVELYAN was rather anxious about her brother when she left the Hall—not painfully anxious, but sorry for this difficulty he had got into so soon, and desirous to hear that he had got over it, and forgotten the village beauty. On the whole, she loved Roger all the better for having fallen in love, and half envied him, and thought within her heart, with a sigh, as she stood looking into the glass, as usual, before she went downstairs to join the party in the drawing-room, how pleasant it was to be so young, to have time to spare for all these passions and distresses. The people at Horsley Park had an uncomfortable habit of sending for their letters in the evening, which almost neutralised their good dinners—for they were in themselves very comfortable people, to whom nothing untoward ever happened, whose children were all young, and whose correspon-

dence was not troublesome. Miss Trevelyan had more than once had occasion to find fault with this annoying practice, for she was sometimes bored about milliners' bills and other such unlucky accidents of life. She looked with no favour on the tray which came up just as the gentlemen were straggling back to the drawing-room after dinner, with all the letters arranged on it. The fourth night after her return from that little expedition to Windholm, it was with particular distaste that Beatrice beheld the approach of the itinerating post-office. She was talking to somebody whom she rather liked to talk to—a man not in the least loveable or marriageable, or what people call eligible, but very capable of conversation—a quality which Beatrice much appreciated. She was seated in a comfortable chair, talking to this agreeable companion, when the dreaded tray approached her. She put out her hand for her letter with a little inward thrill as she kept on the conversation.

"I did not think you were addicted to correspondence like the other young ladies," said the man she was talking to.

"I am not in the least addicted to correspondence, and I think two posts a day are inhuman," said Beatrice. "One makes up one's mind to it

in the morning; but this is from my brother," she added, with a little relief.

She sat playing with it in her hand, and going on with her talk for a long time after. She was not uneasy about Roger. Poor Roger! in his innocence and tender wretchedness, his sister envied him. That luxury of falling in love, all out of his own free-will and inclination, was something out of the reach of Miss Trevelyan.

"I daresay he thinks he is very unhappy, poor boy," she said to her companion, as she turned over the letter in her hand. "I fear he has been crossed in love;" and she laughed a little soft, musical laugh.

They both laughed over the idea in a well-bred, friendly way; for Beatrice's friend was like herself—not in his first youth, and a man of the world.

"So you don't think being crossed in love a calamity to break one's heart about?" he said; "it is too great a luxury for worn-out old people of the world like"—"us," he was about to say; but he remembered in time, and said "me," which was wiser, though Miss Trevelyan was very tolerant, and slow to take offence.

"Yes," said Beatrice; "but one sees the good of everything just when one has lost the capacity for it." And here, as they began to get on the

edge of sentiment, which was entirely out of place between two who knew each other so well, they both with one consent abandoned the subject, and began to talk about Lady Golightly's ball, which, to be sure, was of the highest interest, as it was to be the first of the season, and her ladyship belonged to a set which was not above taking notice of Sir Roger Trevelyan. Thus Beatrice sat talking, with her brother's letter in her hand. She even went upstairs before she opened it, thinking not of Roger so much as of her late companion, who was one of the ruined men of society. "If he had but a little money," she thought to herself, "or if any good fairy would but make him selfish and stupid, that he might have a chance in the world!" And this was said with a little bitterness, for he was one of Miss Trevelyan's great friends. After she had got comfortably settled in her room, with her dressing-gown on, and her light feathery braids of hair hanging loose about her shoulders, she opened Roger's letter. It was very short and concise, but it startled Beatrice entirely out of her composure. She gave a start which jerked her lightsome locks out of her maid's hands, and dragged out a small handful of the hair, which already began to grow scanty. Even in her surprise and vexation, Beatrice was aware of this

fact, and it made her pause in her excitement; for, though her interest in her brother was great, she could not afford to lose any more of her hair; so she bit her lips to restrain herself, and bade her attendant make haste, and read her letter again with tingling cheeks. When she got up after her hair was arranged, and by chance caught a glimpse of herself in the glass, Beatrice was moved by a momentary thrill of surprise and self-admiration. If she could only look like that when there was anybody to see her! she would not have minded a little agitation or even pain as the cost. This idea passed through her mind involuntarily as she rushed out of the room in her dressing-gown to seek her father—for, in reality, she was in great distress. Roger's letter had been directed to her after two days' pondering, in which it had proved quite impossible to address his father on the subject. Miss Trevelyan knew that Sir Roger was in his room taking care of himself, for he had been out with the hounds, and had caught cold on the previous day. She went softly along the corridor, with a shawl over her dressing-gown, and knocked at the door of her father's room, to the intense astonishment of Bevis. Sir Roger was lounging on the sofa in a very doubtful temper, and Miss Trevelyan's unexpected appearance was

a blessed chance for the unlucky valet, at whom his master had been, as Bevis said, "swearing promiscus" ever since dinner; but the effect produced upon the baronet himself was of quite a different kind.

"What the deuce do *you* want here?" said the ungracious father, rising up from his sofa and staring at her. The visit was so thoroughly a bad precedent, that he felt it ought to be put a stop to at once.

"I have a letter to read to you," said Miss Trevelyan. "Bevis, I will ring when Sir Roger wants you. You had better go downstairs a little, and amuse yourself. Do give me your attention, papa, for half an hour, I beg of you. If it had not been something important I would not come to you like this."

"What the devil do you mean by ordering my man about?" cried Sir Roger, when he found his voice. "What the deuce do you want coming here? A letter! I suppose it's a proposal from some d—d fool or other, that you're in such a hurry. You've no time to lose, to be sure, at your time of life."

Beatrice went on without making the reply to this sneer, which she would have been tempted to make under less serious circumstances; and yet she could not leave it altogether unnoticed. "It

would be a pity to enter into that subject just now, especially as both you and I know very well how it has happened," she said; "but I have not disturbed you at present on my own account. This is a letter from Roger; though I am not going to marry, he is. I told you you would make matters worse by interfering. He has made up his mind to marry this blacksmith's daughter. There is his letter, if you wish to read it. I wish, instead of going into a passion, which will do no good," said Miss Trevelyan, not sorry to have an opportunity for an effectual retort, "you would keep your temper for a few minutes, and let us consider what is best to do."

But this was by no means Sir Roger's way; and his daughter had to sit out one of his outbreaks of rage and blasphemy, contemptuous, and taking no pains to conceal her contempt. When he had relieved himself in this way, he rang furiously for Bevis, notwithstanding Beatrice's remonstrances. "Get me the letters I had yesterday," cried Sir Roger, when that functionary reappeared. "Do you hear? Why the deuce do you stand staring at me like a d—d idiot? Get me the letters, you confounded ass—all the letters I've had since I came here. By Jove! if that's what he's after, he'll find out his mistake. Confound you, Beatrice, don't sit there sneering at

me. I'll see Templar to-morrow, by Jove I will! I'll have that old rascal indicted for conspiracy. I'll cut off the young idiot——"

"I am sorry to interrupt you," said Miss Trevelyan, "but you know you can't cut him off. Don't you think it would be better to make an attempt by fair means to break off the marriage? I suppose they are quite respectable people——"

"Don't be more a fool than you can help," said Sir Roger; "I can't break the entail, if that's what you mean to say, but I can cut off his allowance, by Jove—every penny. I'd like to see him marry on what he has of his own; and by ——, if he goes into the post-obit line, he won't make much of that. They know pretty exactly what Trevelyan's worth by this time, those d—d fellows. Bevis, you deuced idiot, have you found the letters? I thought they were bills, confound them! Stay a bit—oh, ah, yes—here it is."

"I suppose they are respectable people in their way," said Beatrice, going on with a simplicity that sat strangely upon such an experienced woman of the world. "To disgrace an old family cannot be any object to them. I daresay, if they were properly dealt with, they might let him off. If you will consent that I should take it in hand," said Miss Trevelyan; but here she was suddenly stopped short by Sir Roger, who, with one of his

usual pleasant exclamations, pitched at her the letter he had just torn open and glanced over. It struck her hand sharply, and roused into sudden irritation a temper which, though quite under restraint, was still in existence, and could be roused when occasion was. It was, perhaps, that chance blow, more than anything else, which determined the part that Beatrice took in the transaction; for curiously enough it was the writer of the letter and not the hand that threw it, against which she felt indignant, as she took it up after an offended pause and began to read. This was William Stanfield's just and honourable letter—which, but for that unlucky stroke, and the resentment which had been slowly gathering, might have found its way to the heart still capable of comprehending it, which beat in Beatrice Trevelyan's breast. The blacksmith had written as follows:—

"Sir,—I had little thought when I parted with you the other day of having any occasion to enter into correspondence with a gentleman so much out of my way, but things have happened so that I have no resource but to write to you. The day after I saw you I had an interview with Mr. Roger Trevelyan, your son, and desired him on his honour to keep away from my house and society. The

young man obeyed me, as was his duty, but by misfortune met my daughter on the road, where she was passing upon her own business. It appears he spoke to her, as young creatures at their age will speak to each other, and my child being innocent, made answer according to what was in her heart. When they came to me, which it should be a comfort to you to know, your son did, honest and honourable as became a man, I did all that man could do, short of contempt of a true attachment and cruelty to my own flesh and blood, to put them separate. This letter is to tell you that I was not successful. They cleave to each other as nature ordains, though it is no joyful sight to see, to a man of my mind. It is against all my hopes and wishes, perhaps more than it can be against yours; but I cannot deny the truth, and the bond between them is one no father can break. Things being come thus far, it becomes my duty to consider my own child. I am free to tell you, Sir Roger Trevelyan, that I would forfeit a thousand pounds paid down, and that gladly, that your son had never come near my house; but as things are there is no remedy. I therefore take this means to let you know, and though there can be little doubt what your opinion will be after the sentiments you expressed to me, it would still be well that we held some

counsel on the subject, being one, I suppose, equally distasteful to you and to me, though decided beyond our interference. In the meantime I remain, Sir Roger,

"Your obedt. servt.,

"W. STANFIELD."

Beatrice read this letter with a rising colour and quickened breath. Had it been shown to her in other circumstances, she would have recognised the true spirit in it, and perhaps have reconsidered her conclusions, and come to better thoughts. But her long-restrained temper had to find an outlet somehow, and that touch at the beginning had turned all the balance wrong. She saw only false pretence and hypocritical knavery in the blacksmith's distress. He to pretend that he regretted the miraculous chance that was to make his daughter a Trevelyan—Lady Trevelyan, when Sir Roger's day was over! The thought that she might have to acknowledge as her sister, perhaps her chaperone and protector in the time to come, an ignorant country girl, most probably with nothing in the world to recommend her but some certain amount of pink-and-white beauty, which she would be equally ignorant how to preserve and how to make use of, stung Beatrice to the quick. She crushed

the letter in her hand in momentary fury. "I asked you to leave the matter to me," she said, "but then I supposed I had only an honest countryman to deal with. This fellow must be a knave and a hypocrite. Tell me, please, what is the utmost you can do."

She looked up, surprised to get no answer, and saw Sir Roger rather redder than usual in the face, fumbling over another letter in his hand. "So, so—*she's* thereabouts"—he was saying to himself, and Beatrice, without being aware of it, drew back from the table with a rustle of disgust, which recalled him to the matter in hand. When he heard this, he looked up at her with his usual grace—"You'd like to go, eh?" he said. "A great deal of good you'd do with your d—d management. I know women too well for that; perhaps I'll go down myself," said Sir Roger; "it appears I've got a friend there. As for you, you'd a deal better let the deuced idiot alone. He'll waken up without a penny in his pocket, the d—d young scoundrel! I'll teach him morality. I can't stop his marriage, the confounded fool, if he's ass enough for that, but I've known as clever a trick as that he might cheat the respectable old idiot. By Jove! I'll send down Bevis to track her out," the baronet muttered to himself; but even he had grace

enough to respect the presence of Beatrice, and say it under his breath. Then, after a moment's pause, he fell into a fit of laughter. "By Jove! I know what I'll do," said Sir Roger; "you may go to bed and sleep in peace. Bevis, shut that confounded door—or rather open it for Miss Trevelyan. Good night! Don't trouble yourself. By Jove! I know what I'll do," said the virtuous father; and so the consultation came to an end.

As for Beatrice, she got up and went her stately way, with a slight bend of her head, disgusted and disappointed, as, to say the truth, was not unusual when by any impulse she sought her father. She brought Stanfield's letter with her in her hand without knowing it, and when she had returned to her own room, to her cosy fire, and the pleasant easy-chair, in which she would have lain back and dreamed, had there been anything pleasant to dream about, a wonderful rage and envy seized the mind of the solitary woman. Who was this Agnes, that for her happiness the ancient family of the Trevelyans should be thus disturbed? What right had she to have her own way and her first love, and all that was sweet and dear to woman? Miss Trevelyan, for her own part, had lived a great many years longer in the world, and, with much more right to have circumstances yield to

her, had yet had none of the good things which were dropping in a heap at the feet of this village girl. Roger, though he was her brother, passed altogether out of the mind of Beatrice. She thought only with a certain strange silent fury of the other woman, for whose sake, and that she, forsooth, might have what her heart desired, all these convulsions were to be produced. Why should this Agnes have her heart's desire any more than any other woman—any more than she herself, for whom no one interfered except to thwart and blight her prospects? Thus upon two women at the very opposite ends of life Agnes's good fortune fell like a personal injury. It flushed with anger the warm colour of Mrs. Stanfield as she wrote that letter, which Sir Roger was at the present moment thrusting into his pocket with playful oaths and laughter; and it deepened the delicate pucker over Miss Trevelyan's forehead, as she sat in her easy-chair looking into the cheerful fire. What right had one more than another to be happy, and innocent, and pure, and to be guarded against all evil? It was the question both these women were asking, each out of the dreary background of her own experience; and the innocent girl, knowing nothing about it, had already procured for herself by her mere happiness the enmity of both.

It was very wrong and wicked, no doubt; and yet these poor souls had in their way a kind of bitter reason for it; for up to this moment no one could have said that Agnes, all untried and secure, was more worthy of the safety and happiness which surrounded her, than they would have been in an equally protected and sheltered position. If to them had been given a protector as watchful and tender, who could say what womanful and sweet existence might not have come out of these lives, of which the one was guilty, and the other worn and disappointed and full of care? It is easy enough to be sorry for the sorrowful, but it requires a strength of goodness, and sympathy beyond the common, to be glad that other people are better off—infinitely better off than one's self. These not unnatural grudges at her happiness did not disturb Agnes, but they created a strange disturbance in the thoughts of Miss Trevelyan as she leaned back in her chair and pondered a letter which she meant to write to her brother next morning. After reading Stanfield's letter, that was all she felt inclined to do.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Efforts of the Family.

WHEN Miss Trevelyan awoke the next morning, it was with a distinct sense of having something to do not very usual to her; and when she had time to collect her thoughts, she did not find herself more leniently disposed towards the culprits than on the previous night. As was natural, she freely forgave Roger, concerning whom, indeed, the experienced woman thought only with pity, as the victim of the transaction; and when breakfast was over she returned to her room to write her letter to him, with so thorough a sense that it was her duty, that it was impossible not to imagine such remonstrances as she meant to make must have an effect. A mother warning her son against a crime could not have been more in earnest, or felt more entirely the importance of what she was going to say. Her impulse even was so warm as to move her to a certain

eloquence. She wrote rapidly with a kind of inspiration, not pausing to think of her sentences, as was her custom; for Miss Trevelyan was one of the people of whom it is common to say that they write very good letters. But there was no effort of letter-writing in the following epistle, which came direct from her heart:—

"My dear Roger,—Your letter has distressed me very much—more than it would be possible for me to tell you. I had not the slightest suspicion that such an unfortunate accident was likely to happen; indeed, I quite understood that you had made up your mind to turn your back *resolutely and for ever* on the temptation which was in your way. My dear brother, I am not so much surprised at your want of moral courage to do this, as I am at the way in which your hesitation has been taken advantage of. If I could even overlook the disgrace to such a family as ours of the marriage you are contemplating, I cannot shut my eyes to the *certain misery* you are laying up for yourself; and I hope you will suffer me to speak to you plainly and for your good. I am willing to take for granted that you are so far right in your estimate of the young woman. She is pretty, I have no doubt, and good, as you say, and must have a little super-

ficial refinement, or she never could have attracted *you.* All this I am quite willing to believe; but it is not what I am ready to allow she may be, but what *I am certain she is not,* which grieves me so deeply, and gives me courage to say all I am going to say. You have been used to good society, my dear Roger. I don't mean to say that many persons, even of the lower classes, may not be more happy in their domestic relationships than we are; but, after all, happiness is not the first consideration. You are used to people who know every sort of thing, and all the persons who are worth knowing—people whom you can't go wrong with, who are sure to be acquainted with quantities of your friends, and to understand your conversation, and go to all the same places, and do about the same things as you do. You cannot conceive how strange it feels to fall out of society, and go among people—it does not matter even if they are your equals; country people or old-fashioned people are almost as bad as if they belonged to another class—who have no comprehension of your talk, and don't understand your kind of life. I have tried it, and I know. Women do not always continue young and pretty (I wish they did), and when her bloom has faded, you will find yourself with a dull companion, who has not an idea how to talk

to you, and could not be amusing for her life; and the more amiable she is, the more entirely this will be the case. And then, however fond you might be of her, she will know nobody, she will not understand how things are done; and with so much personal talk as is always going on in society, she will get utterly bewildered and become a dull woman, and put you to greater shame than ever.

Don't be affronted with me for speaking so frankly. This is all equally the case, even allowing her to be a little clever, which I don't doubt she is. Just imagine to yourself a country girl, who knows nobody, dropped into our society even here, though the Horsleys are nothing particular. We don't talk of books, you know, which she might read and get herself up, or of abstract questions which you could tutor her in, as people do in novels—we talk of things in general, and the people whom everybody (in society) knows, and who is going where, and things that are happening. And you know, my dear, if you were to take a little care, and make a proper marriage, you might aspire to a much better set than poor papa cares for. This is just the aspect of the subject that a young man is sure never to think of. I don't mean to imply in the least that she would not

make you what people call a good wife; but think what your feelings would be to see your wife—more especially when she was Lady Trevelyan, which must happen some day—sitting frightened and stupid at the head of your table, without a word to say. A woman in such circumstances, if she had much spirit, would probably run into flirtation, which, so far as the world was concerned, would be the best thing; for she would always get men to stand up for her by taking that line, and women might be deceived, and think it was not so much stupidity as coquetry that kept her silent in general society; but it can't be supposed that such a state of affairs would be agreeable to *you*. On the whole, my dearest Roger, I do beseech you, think it all over, and consider what I have said. In all this I have not said a single word against the young woman, but have taken her entirely at your own estimate; though I must say, that a woman who can accept such a sacrifice, and permit you to marry her at *the cost of all your prospects*, is not the sort of woman I have been brought up to respect. Does she consider herself worth such a self-renunciation on your part? I am sure *I* should not, and I have advantages in some respects, though, perhaps, I might not be able to compete with her in others. A man who has

always been trained to consider himself the first object, may be excused, perhaps, for such an act of arrogance, but a woman ought to know better; besides, she never can better her position or yours if you marry her, which a man, if he had dragged a girl into obscurity, possibly might hope to do.

"I want to say everything I can think of, Roger, my dear, dear boy, for it is impossible to make too much of what you are going to do; you will find it the turning-point of your life. Recollect that a man who is driven out of the society of his equals, even when it is not his own fault, or who withdraws from it, which is almost the same thing, is sure to lose caste in every way, and become either a misanthrope or disreputable. You and I have to struggle against something in respect to poor papa, but that is a great deal harder upon me than it would be upon you, if you entered society as you might do; and then, you know, a man after he is married is very much confined to the set his wife takes him into. That is to say, of course he may meet people at his club or in the world, if he chooses to go out alone, but it is she that determines the society he can have at home. Think over all this carefully, my dear Roger, and don't think you are alone in being obliged to make a decision against what appears to be your happiness for the moment.

Few men would hesitate, when the girl with whom they had unfortunately become involved was of so humble a rank of life; but most men have this sort of thing to do, and still more, one way or other, most women! Before I was your age, my dear, *I* had to make up my mind, and though the person was very different, being, as I hope I do not need to say, *at least a gentleman*, though with nothing to live on, my sense of duty carried me through, as I hope it will also support my dear brother when he has finally made up his mind. It is a less sacrifice in one sense than that which I made, because, so far as he himself was concerned, the person whom I gave up in obedience to papa's command, was a man whom any woman might have been proud of—highly cultivated and always well received wherever he went. But it is perhaps a greater sacrifice for you to give up your own way, because you have been accustomed to have it—a thing which we poor women never are from our cradles. I hope, after you have considered everything, you will write to me again a very different kind of letter from that I received yesterday, and be assured, my dearest Roger, of my full and cordial sympathy in the painfulness of the sacrifice; but it is your duty, and it ought to be made.

"Most affectionately your sister,

"BEATRICE TREVELYAN."

This letter occupied nearly six sheets of note paper, for Miss Trevelyan wrote a somewhat large hand, as is usual now-a-days, and had too much sense to cross. It was quite a bulky packet when she had put it up; and she carried it downstairs with her, when she went to lunch, with a sense of its importance not altogether new to Beatrice, who was in the habit of consoling herself for the drawbacks of her life by correspondence, as so many women do at her age. Notwithstanding, when she met her companion of the previous evening, she thought it good to explain the unusual size of the letter she held in her hand. "I have been doing a very foolish thing," she said, as she deposited it on the hall table; "I have been remonstrating against a marriage—I wonder if my arguments will be of any use."

"What, all that?" said her friend; "if it is to a lady, I daresay she'll enjoy it, but I'm afraid if it's a man he'll think himself virtuous if he reads half. Don't entertain vain expectations of its doing any good."

"It's my brother," said Beatrice, a little disheartened. "I feel very warmly about it. You know I told you last night."

"So!—" said Miss Trevelyan's confidant. "I remember. He does not mean to break his heart,

then, as you supposed?"—and he laughed, as he followed her into the dining-room, where most of the party were assembled, as it was a wet day, and eating lunch was a distraction not to be despised. If she had said as much to a woman, the chances are that curiosity at least would have made her listener a little more sympathetic, but her male friend did not ask any further questions about the history thus indicated. Family accidents of that description were too common to awaken the curiosity of a man of the world, who, though he had a friendship for Beatrice, cared little for the fortunes of the Trevelyan family, who did not seem to him at the present moment to have much to lose. Beatrice, too, was a woman of the world, and knew very well that her affairs were much less interesting to the world in general than less experienced persons are apt to imagine; and yet it disheartened her in spite of herself to see how lightly her confidant took her distress. She bore her part, however, in the occupations of the day in her own person without giving the household any particular reason to suspect how much she was preoccupied, though it was not always in her power to restrain a bit of sarcasm now and then, which gave relief to the bitterness of her thoughts.

Sir Roger, for his part, was in a much more

jovial state of mind. He had sent off Bevis with private instructions in the morning, and he told the story of his son's folly with his usual elegance of expression to his friends. "My fool of a boy has got into a d—d scrape about a woman—means to marry her, by Jove!" said the baronet, with a burst of laughter, as if it was a capital joke; and so, indeed, his companions regarded the story. Perhaps Sir Roger's confidential agent had a similar feeling, as he made his way towards Windholm with instructions to seek out the mysterious writer of the anonymous letter which had warned the anxious father of his son's danger. Though Sir Roger Trevelyan had done his best to cloud and extinguish the faculties nature had bestowed upon him, he still had, in his debased way, a sufficiently prompt understanding; and he divined who was the author of the epistle he received with an instantaneous certainty which would have flattered and pleased the blacksmith's wife far more than any such vile recollection ought to have pleased her. But Sir Roger, though he recognised *her* in the production of her genius, could not have imagined any possibility so wild as that she should be the wife of William Stanfield. He sent his valet with instructions to find her out and give her a commission to Roger, which perhaps, in present circumstances, he might

receive more patiently than he had shown himself disposed to listen to the advice of his virtuous father. For, indeed, Sir Roger did not believe in his son's goodness, nor understand the honesty, the truth, and pure thoughts of a genuine love; and he had the conviction of experience that a woman was the best tempter when vice was expedient and necessary. Such was the errand upon which Bevis —who, though his principles were of a very unelevated description, was, notwithstanding, somewhat revolted by his mission—had been sent; and his master entered into the occupations of his day thereafter with an approving and comfortable conscience, feeling that whatever happened he at least had done his duty; which indeed, though expressed in a different manner, was a conviction very similar to that with which Miss Trevelyan, with her letter in her hand, had come downstairs.

Bevis, however, who was not a principal, but only an agent, went away to execute his master's commission, dutiful, yet somewhat disgusted, as we have seen; for somehow the depravity of other people impresses a man, however hardened, with a more lively sense of baseness than any vice of his own; and perhaps his want of success at Windholm arose a little from the fact that his consciousness of the odious business he was about made him unconsciously a little languid in per-

forming it. And then he set out with a fundamental mistake, for which, however, he was not to blame. He sought the woman, much better known to him than to the Windholm public, among the less reputable classes of that little community. It entered as little into his head as into Sir Roger's to look for her among the respectable matrons of the village, and the consequence was that he inquired in vain. Nobody could identify the person of whom he was in search. If he had managed to reach any knot of virtuous female gossips on the Green, the lively faculties of investigators so skilled and experienced might have seized upon the truth; but the idea did not occur to the busy brains from which Bevis sought his information. No one answering to his description was to be found in the *demi-monde* of Windholm. But accident favoured the search which was carried on with so little spirit, and brought it to a successful conclusion at last.

When the discomfited valet was on his way to the railway-station, and beginning to realise the kind of reception which would be given him by his master when he returned unsuccessful, the powers which watched over Mrs. Stanfield's peace had so far forgotten their charge as to put her full in the way of her pursuer and

tempter. She was coming down the road, full-blown and important, in her new bonnet, arrayed in all the finery with which the village could furnish her, when her figure caught the eye of Bevis. She was talking to some one at the moment, and did not observe him. To some one!—it was the Vicar's wife, whose instinctive feminine sense of something lawless and dangerous in the strange choice of William Stanfield had been for the moment overcome by her curiosity about the still more extraordinary marriage which was now the general subject of discussion at Windholm. It was in the full elation of this unlooked-for honour—flushed and proud with the consciousness of being at last acknowledged by "the quality," that the unfortunate woman, turning round to pursue her way home, met her enemy full in the face, without any possibility of escape. It was no figure of speech to say that she could have sunk into the ground at the unwelcome sight; but unhappily that was easier said than done, and twelve stone of substantial charms are not so easily disposed of. No lucky opening or dark passage was at hand by which she might have eluded the meeting; and she dared not run the risk of being followed into any of the shops or houses in which she could have taken shelter in her critical circumstances. There was nothing

for it but to accept, with terrors inexpressible, the insolent and familiar greeting such as no man had ventured to address to her since she became the blacksmith's wife, by which Bevis expressed his satisfaction at the meeting.

"So, here you are at last!" he said, "and in capital time, by George! A pretty race you've led me all through this —— place; not a soul here seems to know you. Changed your ways, eh?—turned over a new leaf?—that's a good one, that is. But I've got a message for you, and a deal to say."

"I don't want to hear nothing you've got to say," said the unhappy woman. "Oh! for goodness gracious sake, go away. Please God, I'm a changed woman; I don't want to have no more to do with them as led me astray. I've them to stand by me as won't let nobody make a bother," she cried, in desperation; "if you want to keep your own bones safe, for goodness gracious sake, Bevis, go away!"

But Bevis only laughed at this vehement address.

"D—— me if I ever saw you looking better!" said the diplomatist. "So, you're mortal frightened of me, my lady?—so much the better for me. I'm not come on my own account, Madam —whatever your name is; but it's a temptation

to keep it up on my own account to see you in such a deuced fright. So, you're setting up for respectable, are you? What will you give me if I don't tell?"

Here, however, the terrors of the woman became so extreme that her assailant grew frightened in his turn. Her flush increased to deep crimson; her eyes wandered uneasily about her. If by any chance "the master" should come in sight!—or, what was perhaps a still greater risk, young Roger Trevelyan, to whom her unwelcome acquaintance would be known! The only thing to be done in such circumstances was to escape somewhere, out of sight at least.

"If you'll go to the Common I'll join you in a minute or two," said the unfortunate woman, in a choked voice; "it can't do you no good to ruin me. I'll follow you to the Common, I will, and hear what you've got to say."

"You'll go with me, if you please, my lady!" said Bevis. "I ain't no objection; but trust you to run off and leave me in the lurch, I won't, if you were to ask it on your bended knees. We have had a walk together before now, many's the day," said the man, with his insolent laugh, "afore you were so hoity-toity with old friends. And I've got a deal to say to you, and lots of messages, and something as you're wanted to do.

Look here!" said Sir Roger's emissary. It was only a little jeweller's box he held in his hand; but the truth was, it exercised a rapidly moderating influence on Mrs. Stanfield's terrors—at least, it brought back other passions equally strong to divide the field with the passion of fear. And besides, there was a certain relief in turning her back upon the village, even with the consciousness that the village was gazing after her; for, after all, the ostrich has a certain reason in its famous device, and is by no means alone in adopting it. And then the lawless creature began to feel the thrill of excitement, curiosity, expectation, all the forbidden stimulants of which she was deprived in her new life of virtue; so that she turned back and made her way to the Common by the side of Bevis, recovering her composure in a manner wonderful to see.

When, however, Mrs. Stanfield re-entered her own house, it was with shortened breath and heated cheeks, and a profusion of explanations which nobody required at her hands. She had met an old friend, she said, and he had given her a deal of news; and if there had been any one in the household sufficiently disengaged to observe her, it would have been perceived that the blacksmith's wife was preoccupied by something which was half a burden and half a goad to

her faculties. She looked at her stepdaughter from time to time with something between scorn and indignation, not unmixed with a touch of pity.

"To think as she should set up for being luckier than other folks!" Mrs. Stanfield said to herself, with panting breath; and in the idea of pride being near a fall, she could almost be sorry for Agnes. And it was thus that Sir Roger Trevelyan's fatherly attempt upon his son's honesty was about to be made.

CHAPTER XV.

A Domestic Traitor.

"I'M not religious, like the master and his girl, nor I don't pretend to be," said Mrs. Stanfield. "Them as had the bringing of me up is to blame for that; but if I ain't a saint, at least I don't pretend to nothing, as some do; and I'm your friend, Mr. Roger, all the same."

"Yes, yes," said Roger, impatiently. "I am sorry to be so completely unable to understand you," he said, after a little pause, restraining himself; "but I suppose I have no reason to doubt that?"

"No, sir, that you haven't," said the blacksmith's wife. And any one with a sufficiently lively imagination may conceive how Roger Trevelyan kept looking at the woman who thus addressed him; thinking (horror of horrors!) that she would soon be legally related to him, *de facto* at least, if not *de jure*, occupying the place of

that ogre mother-in-law who is the favourite bugbear (according to novels, at least) of the mind of England. "No, sir, that you haven't," repeated Mrs. Stanfield, emphatically; "and being so, you needn't be surprised, Mr. Roger, though it ain't, perhaps, the right thing to say in this house, as I'm dead against the marriage. Don't make no outcry, sir, against what I say; I'm no scolard nor religious, like the master, but I've seen a deal o' the world, and I ain't ignorant, like some folks, what's thought among them as know, of sich affairs as this."

"I am obliged to you, I am sure, for the interest you take in me," said Roger; "at the same time, I don't see what your knowledge of the world has to do with it. If this is all you have to say to me, Mrs. Stanfield, perhaps I may go."

"I've a deal more to say," said the blacksmith's wife, who seemed to radiate heat and redness from her flushed countenance through the room, in which the fire was going out, and from which Agnes was absent. "I ain't one to impose upon a young gentleman, whatever other folks may do; and I ain't to say satisfied with the master, though he knows his own concerns. It's not for me to speak, Mr. Roger, and him my 'usband; but there ain't nobody else to say a

word. I say, sir, as you've been tooken up a deal too fast, when you was thinking of nothing but having your diversion, like other young gentlemen. Don't you say nothing, Mr. Roger; I ain't a blaming of you. As for breaking her heart, and such-like, I don't believe in no such nonsense. It ain't becoming to a blacksmith's daughter to have a heart as is broke so easy. You was a-having your diversion, like other young gentlemen——"

"If you were not Stanfield's wife," said Roger, indignantly, "I should tell you to hold your tongue, and let me and my affairs alone. As it is, you'll permit me to leave the house; this sort of talk is not agreeable to me."

"Stop a moment, Mr. Roger," said the woman, laying her eager hand upon his arm. "I may be plain spoken, but I'm your friend—a deal truer a friend than them as would take advantage of you. You was a-taking of your diversion, sir, as I say, not meaning nothing wicked nor nothing serious, and all of a sudden, Mr. Roger, you're hauled up, and can't do nothing but marry or run away. If it ain't the truth, say so; but I knows a trick when I sees one. It ain't just and it ain't fair, and I'm one as knows the world and things that are sure to be said. If I was you, Mr. Roger, I'd no more

wait to be married out of the blacksmith's house than I'd go up in a balloon. I'd take her right away out of her father's hands, and off to Scotland, if it was me."

Roger, who had been standing impatient, with his hat in one hand and grasping the handle of the door with the other, was mollified by this suggestion. He laughed, and took away his hand from the door, and put down his hat on the table.

"That is not a bad suggestion," he said. "I thought you were coming to quite a different end. I wish I could; but I don't see how it is to be done," said the young man, calmly, yet with a smile, as one replies to an impossible suggestion.

Mrs. Stanfield, however, saw by instinct that she had hit upon the vein she sought.

"A common person's wedding ain't for a young gentleman like you, as belongs to the quality," said the tempter. "I don't see as you could bear all the noise and the wishing joy, and all the tradespeople in Windholm at your wedding; and the master, he wouldn't mind no more, for he ain't a man to make a difference. I've a regard for your name, Mr. Roger, though it ain't in my power at this moment to give all the particulars; but if there ain't no escape the

other way, I'd take her off, and take her to Scotland, if I was a young man like you."

"But," said Roger, taking up his hat, "you are a domestic traitor; and I don't know that I am not something like the same for listening to you. Look here, Mrs. Stanfield; the master, as you call him, is not a man to be deceived."

"Lord, it's as easy as easy!" cried the blacksmith's wife, in the extremity of her astonishment; but Roger cut her short.

"It may be easy for a cheat and humbug," said the young man, with energy, "but not for an honourable man. By Jove! it makes a man honourable to look at him. Even if Agnes would listen to such a thing—which she wouldn't—Stanfield's not a man to be deceived. Let me go, if you please; I don't want to hear any more——"

"Just a moment, sir," said Mrs. Stanfield. "I should have thought as a young gentleman like you, as knows what's what, might have known without so much talk, as it would have been a wonderful convenience to the master. Bless your heart, I ain't going against him," said the woman, "not in this. I'd a deal rather, for my part, as there warn't no marriage; but if it's to be, I don't see, for my part, how it's to be out o' this house. It ain't the house you'd like to ask a friend to, now—is it, Mr. Roger? If

you was to make up your mind to Scotland, it would be a deal more convenient both for the master and me."

At this Roger once more put down his hat on the table. "Are you serious?" he said; "is that really your meaning? I can't imagine that Stanfield has such an idea. To be sure, it would be a relief to me; but Agnes—Agnes never would consent; and I should be terribly vexed if she did," he added, under his breath; but this did not catch Mrs. Stanfield's ear.

"You try her, Mr. Roger," said the woman, confidently; "you try her, that's all. There's a many things a girl will do rather than lose her sweetheart—a many more things than that"—the temptress went on, trying her ground—"and I have known women as would rather put up with a deal of ill convenience themselves than insist for a gentleman as was fond of them to make the sacrifice. It's a terrible sacrifice, that is, Mr. Roger," said Mrs. Stanfield, looking with meaning into the young man's face.

He had just been reading his sister's letter; and half because of the reality of what she said, half because the sense of his own importance was naturally agreeable to the young man, he had assuredly felt in his most secret heart that the sacrifice he was about to make for his love

was important enough to demand a little acknowledgment and gratitude; whereas the blacksmith evidently regarded the advantages as lying entirely on the side of Agnes, and gave her with an unconcealed grudge, which commenced to irritate a little—a very little—the temper which Roger shared with his father and sister. Accordingly, as the purpose of the stepmother had not yet made itself apparent to his mind, her testimony to his extreme disinterestedness was not unacceptable. Unconsciously his face cleared a little, and he was more content to listen, even while he disclaimed with magnanimity the superiority thus admitted by the other side.

"No sacrifice can be too great for Agnes," he said, with some magnificence, and yet with all a lover's warmth; and then for the third time, though without any immediate intention of going away, he took up his hat.

"Ah, Mr. Roger, it's fine talking. I've seen many and many's the gentleman like that; but when folks are married it makes a difference. It ain't nothing but great advancement in life for her; but when the novelty's gone off a bit," said the experienced woman—and here she made a solemn pause—"it's then as a gentleman feels the difference," said Mrs. Stanfield. "It ain't in nature as he shouldn't feel it. It's not as she

ain't good—though I will say as she has a bit of a temper of her own, has Agnes, and dreadful fond of having her own way—but it's not as she ain't good. There's a many things as folks understand and can't explain. She ain't been brought up a lady, Mr. Roger, that's what it is."

"But," said Roger, with more tolerant indignation, "she is a true gentlewoman, which is independent of bringing up. No more of this, please; but if there is any truth in what you say about Stanfield and—and the wedding——"

"Mr. Roger," said Mrs. Stanfield, "if I don't understand the master and his ways, who do? I don't say if you asked him as he'd say such a thing; but I'm his wife, and it's natural as I can read in his heart," she said, with a little pride; and then seizing upon the home argument thus put within her reach in passing, she proceeded—"A man should make sure, Mr. Roger, as there ain't nothing in his heart but what's agreeable for his wife to see. When a gentleman makes a great sacrifice for a woman and the novelty wears off, and he feels what he's been and done, it ain't possible to prevent but she finds it out; and there's a many women," said the blacksmith's wife, approaching the object of her commission, and growing breathless as she did so with mingled terror and excitement, "as would liefer make the

sacrifice themselves, and take the consequences, than bind a gentleman for his life——"

"What on earth do you mean?" said Roger Trevelyan. He would have taken what she said simply as implying that Agnes might have given him up, but for the woman's flushed countenance and excited significant looks. It was evident she meant something more important than so vain and so innocent a suggestion.

"I mean what I says, Mr. Roger!" cried the excited creature, getting shrill and breathless in her passion—a passion made up of fear and dislike, and envy, and the sense of wrong in her own person—"I mean what I says. Agnes Stanfield ain't no better than many another woman as has trusted to a gentleman's honour; but it's her and the master to make things fast and sure. She'll be an honest woman, I ain't a denying of it," cried William Stanfield's wife, breaking the bonds that restrained her—"she can't be cast off, nor druv upon the streets; but she'll read in your heart as you're disappointed and 'ave made a sacrifice, and I don't see as she'll be more happy. She can't be cast off like them as has sacrificed themselves; but she ain't no better than other women, that I can see, that things should give way to her; there's a many as bears shame and scorn——"

Roger had been listening with a stupor of astonishment which it would be impossible to describe. He could have refused to believe his ears, and the words which these conveyed to him; but he could not refuse to believe his eyes, which beheld with amazement the extraordinary passion in the woman's face. When she came thus far he stopped her with a moral compulsion which was all but force, throwing himself upon her, as it were, and cutting short her wild monologue.

"Good heavens! what creature is this we have here?" cried Roger, in his wonder. He felt much as if he had seen a serpent on the domestic hearth. "Not another word!—not a syllable! Silence, woman!" cried the young man; and then he set his back against the door and looked at her with all the honest, youthful blood tingling in his cheeks. As for Mrs. Stanfield herself, passion had come to its culminating point with her, and she had burst forth into tears—red-hot tears of rage and vexation, and that feminine desire to express the inexpressible, which never has any other ending. She cried much as she would have scratched or bitten, in utter excess of passion, and rage at having nothing more to say.

Thus they stood for one of those long minutes that feel like years in passing, he looking at her

steadfastly, she weeping with an angry violence, which made it still more remarkable how she could stifle the sound so far as not to alarm the house. Then the young man addressed her sternly—

"Who are you?" he said. "How is it you have found admittance here? It seems to me as if I must have seen your face before. Who are you, woman, and how have you contrived to mask yourself and gain admission here? Good heavens! you are Stanfield's wife!—how have you cheated him, lied to him, to get under his roof—and then to dare to take his daughter's name on your lips! What do you imagine he will say when he hears of this interview you have forced on me——"

"Oh, good Lord!" said Mrs. Stanfield. The tears stopped of themselves at this appeal; the burning moisture dried up, as it was natural that such volcanic dew should dry, in a moment, leaving no trace—"oh, Mr. Roger! you haven't the heart. I've spoke to keep peace atween you and yours; you ain't agoing to make a to-do atween me and mine——"

"To keep peace between me and—— Is it possible that it is my father who has inspired you?" said Roger. "Good heavens!—and you are Stanfield's wife! Don't say

anything more. It is my duty to let him know——"

The frightened woman threw herself almost at his feet in her terror.

"Oh, Mr. Roger! don't you be the ruin of me," she said; "I ain't a bad wife not now, and he's fond of me, is the master. Now, as his daughter's agoing, don't you—oh! don't you, Mr. Roger, come atween him and me!"

Roger took to walking about the room in his dismay and horror. He had observed, like others, the strange difference between Stanfield and his wife, but, like all young people, he had smiled within himself at the elderly second marriage, and imagined that the blacksmith, weak like other men upon that point, had been fascinated by the full-blown charms of the comely vagrant. But now he opened his eyes with consternation upon the true state of affairs—or, at least, upon something which resembled the truth. What was he to do? A woman, depraved and dishonoured, and not even repentant, had suddenly revealed herself to him in the bosom of the household from which he was about to take his wife; and it was his friend—a man whom he could not help respecting and holding in the highest honour—who had given the shelter of his honest name to this ruined creature, who was ready at a word to betray him!

Never before had Roger revolved so difficult a question. What was he to do? His duty to Stanfield, and his natural abhorrence of treachery and impurity, especially when in familiar contact with his innocent and spotless Agnes, disposed him to make instant use of his discovery. But there might be still more humiliating revelations behind for anything he could tell, and to make such a disclosure, and provoke all kinds of village discussion and domestic disgrace on the very eve of his marriage, was too much for the young man's courage, even had he not had before him the look of almost animal agony and appeal with which the culprit was watching his looks. When she saw a gleam of hope, she betook herself to passionate entreaties.

"Oh! Mr. Roger, I'll never say another word. It was for your good—indeed it was for your good. Oh, Mr. Roger! I'm mending my ways, I am. I ain't a bad wife to the master. You wouldn't be the one to throw a poor creature back upon the world as has sinned and suffered, and don't want to go wrong no more? Oh, Mr. Roger! it ain't for you to be hard upon me. If it hadn't a-been for one as is——"

"For God's sake don't say any more," cried Roger; "I don't want to hear any more; keep your horrible secrets. But look here, Mrs.

Stanfield—if I ever find you in communication with any member of my family—if ever I see in you the least disposition to betray your good husband, either in one way or another; and if you don't at once separate yourself from—from his daughter," said the young man, with a sense of indignation and disgust which were almost beyond bearing, "I will immediately let Stanfield know what has passed to-day. You understand what I mean. Oh no, I don't ask you to swear; an oath isn't much, when one's used to lying; but I will keep my conditions, and you know the consequence if you break yours."

It was thus that this strange interview terminated. Agnes had found some unusual business out of doors that morning, and could not understand how it was that her lover was so silent, so constrained and full of thought, all the day after. She thought she had offended him by her absence, and, taking his offence as so much the more a token of his love, exerted herself in all tender, maidenly ways to gain his forgiveness. It was only after he had left her that evening that it came across her mind like a cold shadow that perhaps he had heard from his friends, and that their disapprobation was the cause of his unusual gravity. Poor child! she did not know any better. She could imagine the horror, the misery

of giving cause of offence to those she loved; but already she had penetrated Roger sufficiently to know that his love to his father and sister was of a very lukewarm description; and the pangs that a man might feel, even when in love, when making a *mesalliance*, did not occur to Agnes. It was she that had neglected and vexed him for a whole sunny morning, that was all.

Meantime, Roger made his way back to the Hall with what composure he could, chewing a cud of fancy, which was a great deal more bitter than sweet. True, he was more in love than ever; his eyes were touched with the heavenly glamour; he saw more clearly than ever before the tender graces, the natural endowments sweet and refined, more exquisite than he had before perceived in any woman, which belonged to his future bride; but along with that delightful revelation there came, unfortunately, others much less sweet. Stanfield, though wise and good above most men, and full of natural delicacy, was still naturally wanting in various particulars of conventional necessity, which only the closest contact made apparent; and Roger, notwithstanding his love-blindness, could recognise the truth of Beatrice's letter. Had he not himself by times seen a young woman from the country, *gauche* and silent, sitting confused in the midst

of a gay party, struck dumb by the accustomed babble of the world? and Roger was not more resigned than other young men to think of himself as regarded with compassion, the husband of a speechless beauty, who knew nobody and whom nobody knew. Then he had very serious thoughts of the future, with which sentiment had nothing to do. He had of his own nothing except a little money in the funds, which he could not sell out, and which brought him in something like ninety pounds a year; and his allowance, which was never too regular, and which Sir Roger could withdraw when he pleased—a poor enough prospect to marry upon for a young man who had not been trained to do anything, and who had not an idea what kind of work he was fit for, even had he had the inclination to work. Last of all, this sudden gulf opening under his feet came as the climax of all his doubts and horrors. The blacksmith, though he was a blacksmith, might have been a prince as far as nature was concerned; but the blacksmith's wife! Such were the meditations that attended Roger, as he left Agnes pondering on her imaginary innocent fault, and betook himself to the painful gloom and solitude of the shabby Hall, where there was nothing to distract his thoughts.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Father and the Lover.

WHEN Sir Roger Trevelyan heard of the failure of his expedient, his wrath was great; but when he ascertained (which was not until after a second visit of Bevis to Windholm) what was the present position of the woman over whom he held such influence, hope returned to the mind of the virtuous father. "By Jove, she shan't get off like that; she shall keep at it, d—— her, or we'll expose her," the baronet said; but within himself he chuckled, pleased to know of the disgrace in which, without knowing it, William Stanfield was involved. "Good enough for him, the d—d prig," Sir Roger said; "she'll make Roger hear reason, if she keeps at it; there's nobody like a deuced woman for that;" but at the same time Sir Roger was moved to take other means. He wrote to his son, threatening him with every possible and

impossible penalty; and he wrote to Stanfield as follows:—

"Sir Roger Trevelyan informs the blacksmith Stanfield that he has received his impertinent letter. As he has no doubt it was written when Stanfield was mad or drunk, he will not take any notice of such a piece of impudence, if it is not repeated. Mr. Trevelyan has nothing of his own, and Sir Roger would withdraw every penny of what he allows him if he was to ruin and disgrace himself in such a manner, which will show Stanfield that such a piece of villany is not worth his while.

"Horsley House, March 30th."

This epistle was put into Stanfield's hands after he had gone in to tea, and had seated himself in his great chair with the pleasant fatigue of a man who has done his day's work, and come home to rest at his own tranquil table. For the moment, as it happened, there was no one with him but Agnes, who was arranging the table for tea, a deft and noiseless handmaid. It was the hour the blacksmith loved most. The lover was gone and all immediate trace of him, and for the moment he could forget that his child was no longer all his own; and even the un-

congenial wife was absent, and for anything that appeared, this troublous year of existence might never have been, and the two who were once all in all to each other might have returned to their former safe solitude and peace. It was this sweet moment which was spoiled and rendered bitter by Sir Roger's letter. Stanfield was too honest and true to be able to conceal that it moved him. He uttered a groan when he read it, half of suppressed rage, yet more than half of a pitiful horror for the mind that produced it, and for the possibility of such a man having power to interfere in his concerns.

"What is the matter, father?" said Agnes; and she went up to him to lean over his shoulder, and read his letter, as her custom had been.

This time he put her back with a gentle but decided hand; and, crushing it up in his fingers, tossed it into the fire. Then Agnes divined what it was.

"Is it a letter from Sir Roger?" she asked, all the little colour which was there leaving her cheeks.

"Ay, little one, it's from Sir Roger," he said, with another groan, "and, but for your happiness, I'd say it was a black day that ever Sir Roger had word to say to me or mine."

"Don't say so, father," said Agnes, with the voice of pleading that went to her father's heart.

"No, I'll not say so," said Stanfield; and he sat watching the ashes of the consumed letter, blown about on the hearth, without speaking, without making any response to the wistful inquiring silence with which Agnes kept her place behind his chair. "I'll not say so," he went on half to himself. "A man can keep silence if he can do nought else. It's but nature, little one, but it's hard on fathers and mothers. You have no mother to pine for you, and maybe it's well. They say women have more feeling than men—anyhow, it's harder work to keep it down. Go and make the tea, and we'll speak of it no more."

"But, father," said Agnes, who was now glad to keep behind the chair out of sight, "you know I will do nothing, think of nothing, without your consent."

The blacksmith's brown eyes grew luminous with the smile of tender and tolerant philosophy that was habitual to them. "If I was one that could refuse your heart's wish, little one," said Stanfield, "it might be just to speak like that; but you're not to learn now that short of ill-doing there's nothing on earth would be a sacrifice to me for your happiness. And, child, his father's a man, as far as man can judge, without heart or honour. It matters little to me what such a man can say."

"And he objects?" said Agnes, almost under her breath. Not a thought that the question was a selfish one occurred to the girl—partly because, in the unconscious self-regard of youth, her own immediate affairs seemed sufficiently important to her to eclipse everything in the world; and partly because the possibility of Sir Roger or any man insulting her father never entered her mind as possible; but the father, already possessed as much as his just nature would permit him to be, with a natural involuntary sense of abandonment, heard the question with an ineffable pang of wounded love and pride.

"Ay, he objects," said Stanfield; "that was to be looked for; but it matters little to me what such a man can say. Go you and make the tea."

And when Agnes went away, slightly wounded in her turn, and eager to hear all the details which were thus summarily abridged for her, Stanfield stooped over the fire, leaning his head on both his hands, and pondering, as he recovered from its sting, the import of the letter he had destroyed. He was not a perfect man, this village sage. His pride, which was a fundamental part of his character, was stung to the heart by Sir Roger's insolent note; and as he saw the consumed paper melt into inarticulate ashes, so the intimation it contained died, so far as he was concerned. In the face of such a warning he would have

permitted his child to marry a beggar, proudly proving thereby his utter disinterestedness; but nobody should know from him, not even Sir Roger himself, his knowledge of the bridegroom's utter dependence and helplessness. And then other thoughts came into the blacksmith's mind. Had he been as Roger, young, and with such a bride as Agnes to inspire him, what could he not have done for her sake? how would he have rejoiced in toiling for her, and found the meanest labour beautiful? Perhaps Roger, too, was capable of such inspiration. The good man, who judged no one, who believed no evil, raised himself up at the thought. At least he could wait and see; and in the meantime he said not a word of the news he had just received, and took no notice of it, even to himself. All the effect it had was to make him more decided in the matter of the marriage. It was "the heart's wish," wisely or unwisely, of his only child, and in such a matter William Stanfield could afford to prove to the world, and above all to Sir Roger Trevelyan, that he was capable of securing his daughter's comfort without assistance from any one in the world.

Thus the effect which this last argument might possibly produce upon the young lover was more than neutralized by the effect it produced upon the father of Agnes, whose pride was now enlisted as well as his affections. Not a word was said on the

subject through the long evening, which, once the happiest part of the twenty-four hours to Stanfield, began to oppress him now with a dreamy tedium reflected from the eyes of the "little one." He sighed when she bade him good-night, and when his wife, also worn out, retired earlier than usual, the blacksmith sat lonely by his silent fire, and saw the ashes grow white on the hearth. So he had sat many an evening, revolving his concerns, while the fire died out at his feet, without any very intense sense of the loneliness of his widowhood, and with one soft delicious star on his horizon, to which his mind could refer when he was tired or disappointed, his beautiful and tender woman-child. This grand primary element of happiness had failed to the blacksmith now; he had no longer the thought to fall back upon of that sweet and sacred thing which was his, and of which no man could deprive him. Man had deprived him of his child's heart, and he himself had taken to himself a companion in whom there was no companionship—a mate in whom there was no repose to his heart. That last thought, however, remained utterly unexpressed even in the blacksmith's musings. He was too true and faithful to say even in his secret thoughts any disparagement of the woman to whom he had sworn faith. When the thought occurred to him he lighted his candle, and retired from his place

of meditation. "Poor soul, it's not her fault if she don't understand," he said to himself; but sighed again as he fastened the doors, and finally closed upon the world the still house, in which once there was nothing but peace.

Sir Roger Trevelyan had made the same communication to his son which he had made to Stanfield, although accompanied in the latter case by offers and suggestions which made the young man half mad with rage. He, too, burned his father's letter with an indignation a thousand times more fervent than that felt by the blacksmith; but though he had burned the letter, he had not got rid of its meaning. He sat in the great, gloomy, faded library in the Hall, he and his fire and his lamp making one spot of partial brightness in the desert, and cast away his book to the other side of the room, and tossed his newspaper half into the fire as he abandoned himself to his thoughts. Ninety pounds a year, or thereabouts, was what Roger had of his own; and that idea which came so easy to the blacksmith did not come readily to the young squire. He did not know how to work, or what to work at, though the Trevelyans were poor enough to have made some attempt to "better themselves," like the housemaids; but it had not occurred to Sir Roger to suggest this idea to his son, and the

young man's natural tastes had not as yet led him to the turf, or to any other industrial pursuit which his father might have recognised as a possible profession. Poor Roger could do nothing, not even play whist, except in a very secondary and ineffective manner, and it may be easily supposed that a man thus unqualified could see little hope of helping himself. He sat thinking it over in anything but a comfortable state of mind till the fire had died out at his feet as well as Stanfield's, leaving the chill and dreariness of the great, shabby, uninhabited house to thrill his nerves and irritate his temper. And then, in spite of himself, the letter of Beatrice, and even though he shuddered at her name, the remonstrances of Mrs. Stanfield, returned to his mind. He went to bed in such a state of misery, mind and body, as Stanfield had never known in his life, chilled and discouraged to the heart, feeling himself a martyr and a sacrifice, and not knowing where to turn in the blinding web of circumstances which enveloped him. He loved Agnes, it was true—not a thought of being unfaithful to Agnes was in his heart—but what was he to do? Marry her, and starve in a cottage somewhere, and never lift up his head again in society? That was evidently what his sister expected for him, and he knew his father too well to think of any relenting on

his part. It was a strange state of mind for an accepted and triumphant lover; but poor Roger was no hero, and the combined influences of a withdrawn allowance and an expulsion from the paradise of society, were more than he had strength to bear.

He stumbled upstairs half-bewildered with the multitude of his thoughts, and almost ready to curse the day when he had hesitated and lingered, instead of leaving Windholm for ever, as his better genius had counselled him. And at the same time, he could not make up his mind to give up this village girl, who had made him so happy and so miserable. If the blacksmith had proposed to separate Agnes from him, the young man would have recovered in a moment all his eagerness and determination; but, at the same time, having won her, without any more doubt on that subject, it felt hard to give up everything else that made life agreeable in exchange. He said to himself that other men did not require to buy the object of their affections at so costly a price, and threw himself on his bed as moody and discontented a man as was in all the parish of Windholm. It was, perhaps, about the same moment that Agnes woke dreaming of him, and lay all covered over and hidden in the sweet darkness, not caring to sleep again, because the waking dreams were sweeter than those of sleep—for the Sir Roger

who objected was as nothing to her in presence of her own father, who had consented. If she could have divined the state of her lover's thoughts, what sudden horror would have chilled her maiden dreams! But, perhaps, it was because she had so much to brave in life, when it should come, that the preface was spared to her; and still it was the woman who had the best of it in this fair vestibule and ante-chamber of existence. She could sit and wait, peaceful and unexigent, till life came, brightening all the doorway with marriage wreaths and blessings. So while all the others threw themselves down upon their beds agitated and restless, disturbed by thoughts of what was, Agnes lay awake, and planned what was to be. It seemed to her as if she would like it better if Roger were, for a time, disinherited, and the two were to be all in all to each other. She planned how she should manage for him, so that he would never discover he was poor; and how, day by day, they would grow together, thinking the same thoughts, dreaming the same dreams. Such was the difference between them at this early period of their history. She was too young, too ignorant, too absolute in the unity of her youth for complications, and so for once in her life took her joy with both hands full and cordial, accepting no doubtful omens, no prelude of evil augury to the epic of her life.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Blacksmith and the Gentleman.

THE next morning, after a troubled night, Roger Trevelyan, taking counsel with himself, and having at the bottom—all incapacities and failure of intellect or training allowed for—a genuine honesty, concluded upon laying before Stanfield himself the decision of Sir Roger, and his own penniless circumstances. He went his usual way to the village without his ordinary elasticity, pondering heavily enough the position in which he stood. Ninety pounds a year! Roger had heard of old palaces in Italy, of places in Wales and the Highlands, where people could go and economize; but economy practised at so low a rate could be nothing better than starvation, and it was difficult to believe mere existence possible on such terms. To be sure, he had heard of curates with no more, but then was not a married curate the emblem of starvation all the world

over? There was, however, a little compensation in the thought of carrying off his bride utterly away from everybody belonging to her—perhaps to find some faded frescoed rooms in a Neapolitan palace, where they could teach each other Italian, and where it would be less easy to discover her low degree and ignorance of society; where the two could exist on maccaroni and oranges, and where the want of servants and comforts could be attributed not to poverty but to the customs of the country. Such an idea might be possible, might even be practicable in a way; but then there were contingencies to be considered, which might complicate matters horribly. When he reached the forge he made his salutations to Agnes at the window with as clear a brow as possible, and then dived under the archway to find her father. Stanfield was at work as usual among his men, but Roger had never known him otherwise, and up to the moment of his engagement with Agnes had much admired the skilful steady craftsman, primitive worker in iron, whose wisdom and thoughtfulness somehow corresponded so entirely with his large frame and deliberate movements. But now-a-days everything was changed. Roger's admiration for the man had begun to merge into a vehement objection to see the father of his Agnes thus occupied; and the fitness of all things

and evident adaptation of the man to the place fretted the more the petulant young spirit, unaccustomed to toleration. He felt affronted that Stanfield did not immediately lay aside his tools to attend to him, and yet when the tools were laid aside and the master came forth into the yard to listen to his story, young Roger felt still more affronted to see the composure with which the blacksmith had given up his work, putting on his coat and giving his orders with an apparent sense of the importance of the interview for which the young man saw no reason; for was not the cause of the interview at present buried in his own breast?

"I want to consult you, Stanfield," said the young man. "I have had letters from home. If you can spare a little time, I want you to understand my position and to advise me what to do."

"Yes, I can spare the time," said the blacksmith. "I gave my orders, as you would hear, before I left."

"Why, you look as if you had known beforehand, and expected me," said Roger, more impatient than ever.

"Perhaps I did," said the blacksmith; "things cannot go on for ever in an uncertain way. It was to be expected you should have letters from

home, and it was to be expected also that you would pay me the compliment of consulting me."

This statement, though perfectly natural and spoken with the utmost calmness and good temper, aggravated Roger, as, indeed, it is probable anything said under the circumstances would have aggravated him. He had to stop to recover his temper and his breath.

"Your father objects as a matter of course," said Stanfield, taking advantage of this pause, "as he has a good right to object; and Miss Trevelyan remonstrates, I don't doubt, being a good sister. Now, Roger Trevelyan, you and me are friends. You may have your faults like other men, but I believe you honest and true. If you're any way moved in your mind by what you have heard, as would be very natural, say it out like a man. Hear me first to the end. I'll not blame you more than I can help, and I'll be thankful to you from the bottom of my heart; and as for *her*, she's not a weakling, that cannot bear a blow. Speak out like a man."

"What do you take me for, Stanfield?" said Roger, driven back upon his better self and flaming with youthful indignation. "Do you think me a dolt or a villain? What do you mean? After consenting to give me Agnes, you

dare to question me like this! What have I done to deserve such an insult? I came to consult you, and you——"

"I ask your pardon," said the blacksmith, holding out his hand. It was not unstained by his work, a fact which Roger remarked even at this moment. "I ask your pardon," he repeated; "it was because I was proud of my treasure, and loth to see her undervalued. A man has pride in his children according to his condition of life, Mr. Trevelyan. Sir Roger grudges you to one below you in this world, and for me, I grudge my daughter to make what man or woman could call an interested marriage——"

Roger laughed rather bitterly. "My father would not have the least objection that either Beatrice or I should make what are called interested marriages; but I suppose you did not mean to be satirical when you spoke of pride according to the condition of life. Look here, Stanfield: what I came to tell you was this—that your daughter, when she marries me, will marry a beggar. I have ninety pounds a year that my godfather left me, and I have always had my allowance up to this moment; but now you understand what form Sir Roger's displeasure takes. He tells me if I choose to marry it must

be upon what I have of my own; and that is ninety pounds a year."

"Well?" said Stanfield, lifting his luminous eyes. Something from within lighted them up so that they shone upon the young man like two great orbs of life, full of such vigour and inspiration that they dazzled him. The blacksmith did not see that the matter ended there. So many suggestions beamed out from him, finding unfortunately but an opaque surface in which there was little power of reflection, that Roger felt himself suddenly disconcerted and put to shame, he could not tell how.

"Well," he repeated, still with impatience, "it is far from being well; the fact is, the disadvantages are all on my side. It is, I repeat, a beggar to whom you are going to give your daughter. I have no concealments from you, Stanfield. This is the position in which my father leaves me, and I have not the least hope that he will change his mind. Indeed," said Roger, hastily, "I will not ask him. You know something of Sir Roger, Stanfield. I have a repugnance to mention to him the very name of Agnes. He does not understand it. That's finished and at an end; and here am I, who have the presumption to ask her to marry me upon ninety pounds a year?"

"I have known men that had the presumption

to marry upon what was a deal less than that—and a deal more," said the blacksmith; "upon their willing hands and ready head, that took pride in working for their own. In our condition that's the common capital, Mr. Roger. If we are to wait for allowances and money in the funds, we might wait all our lives. It's nature that a man should work for his wife. I ask no more for Agnes; it was all her mother had, and she was content."

"Ah! yes," said Roger, bitterly; "you have the use of your hands and the use of your head, and it is easy to talk. But what is the good of us, with our training? If I were to set to work, I could not earn as much as your apprentice does. The use of good birth and what is called good education in England, is that a man is good for nothing. Stanfield, if you were as young as I am, and had not a penny nor a prospect of one, you would still be richer than me!"

"That's as may be," said the blacksmith, to whom this implied compliment had, as was natural, a little sweetened the disappointment of finding the young man thus resign himself to his utter want of resource; "that's as may be. So far as I can see from the newspapers and other things I have met in my life, the men of your class and training can go through more labour

than men of mine. Not at the anvil, I allow," said Stanfield, with his gradual deliberate smile, which lighted up all his face by degrees; "that's not to be wished. But it's harder work to labour with the brains than with the hands."

"Yes," said the impatient young man, who was not at present disposed to take kindly to any suggestion, "when a man has brains to work with. Look here, Stanfield; you know most things a great deal better than I do, but some things I have had experience of. I have seen loads of men leave the university with honours and all sorts of hopes, and then come to a dead stop; they had not a penny, no more than one of your young blacksmiths. They did not want to go into the Church and starve; perhaps they hadn't energy enough to make slaves of themselves at the bar. What on earth were they to do? They couldn't go into trade, and that sort of thing, you know; and as for literature and writing for the papers, that's overstocked already. They might hang about at home, or they might go out to Australia; but even there your blacksmith would do more good if he had a head on his shoulders. As for you, you've got the use of your hands; for us, we can't even starve with a good grace. We're the paupers of the world," cried Roger, with energy quite unnecessary. It

relieved his mind, however, to deliver himself thus explicitly. Meanwhile, the blacksmith regarded him with that smile of tolerant incredulity which became a man of steady mind and much experience in presence of the rhapsodies of youth.

"You would have me believe, then, that an education is the worst thing a young man can have," he said; "I cannot give into that at this precise moment. I've heard say that real training, no matter what kind it was, was good for everything; and, to tell the truth, that's my opinion. If a young man learns to give up his pleasure and keep steady, even if it were but at Greek and Latin," Stanfield added, with a sense of apology for these not immediately useful branches of education, "it's always so much the easier for him to work at other things. That's my opinion, Mr. Trevelyan. But I grant that a young man trained up to great expectations is under a disadvantage," said the blacksmith, seriously; and then he stopped short, with the air of a man who has come to a grave and somewhat unexpected difficulty, and does not see his way through.

Roger, whose senses were exasperated into unusual acuteness, felt, he could not have explained how, that the father of Agnes was disappointed—not in the least by his poverty, but by

himself; but by this time he had pretty nearly exhausted his ill-humour and excitement, and walked on by the blacksmith's side with a sense of depression, calmed down and a little overawed, as he seldom could help himself from being, by the moderation and good sense of his companion. The first part of the conversation took place in the yard, where they were, however, too much interrupted by people coming and going to remain; and Roger had followed passively the steps of Stanfield across the Green and down a quiet, leafy country road, leading to some of the substantial houses of the village, where at present there were few passengers. The conjunction of the young squire and the blacksmith had ceased to be remarked at Windholm, for now even the first outbreak of indignation and amazement with which the news of Agnes Stanfield's great match had been received had blown over a little. The two walked along side by side, Stanfield lost in thought, and his young companion feeling very much as a dependent youth might feel who was waiting for his patron's decision upon the future tenor of his life.

"Mr. Trevelyan," said the blacksmith, at last, "you and me must understand each other. You are indignant when I ask you if your mind has been affected by what you have heard from home,

and I like you all the better for your indignation; but then you give me to understand," Stanfield proceeded, still with the utmost gravity and kindness, but with a momentary inflection in his voice which his susceptible hearer took for contempt, "that a man with ninety pounds a year is a beggar, and that a man with your training is good for nothing, and not to be expected to work for his family; there may be truth in all you've said—but what is to be drawn from it? That is the thing most important both to you and me."

"I was coming to that," said Roger, with rising irritation. "You know my circumstances as well as I do. My wife will be Lady Trevelyan one day; and the property, though it is mortgaged, is considerable. We shall do very well when——"

"Your father dies?" said Stanfield, with a certain reproof in his voice.

"Yes," said Roger, hastily; "if my father was reasonable and showed any consideration, I should not speak so. But, nevertheless, that is the case; and in the meantime I can raise a little money, and we can go abroad. There is very cheap living to be had in Italy, and Agnes could have masters—I mean could accustom herself—I mean would enjoy seeing Switzerland and Italy, and all sorts of places. That is the best plan I

can form: it isn't any way highflown, as if I pretended not to care for money, or pretended to be able to make money, or to—to introduce her into society immediately. That is not possible with so small means. I mean to be honest with you, Stanfield, and show you exactly how things stand; and that is the best plan that occurs to me."

Stanfield listened to the whole without any further remark. He did not speak even when Roger, finding the pause embarrassing, went into further details. It was a bitter draught which he had to swallow just at that moment. In the first place, to have his child separated from him at once and definitively—that he had more or less calculated upon; then Agnes could have masters, Agnes could accustom herself to her new condition—could, in short, be made presentable when her young husband came into his fortune; she, who was to Stanfield in her present simplicity as a princess among ordinary women. The blacksmith swallowed this bitter morsel in silence, schooling himself, in the tolerance of his nature, to see for the moment with the eyes, not of an adoring father, but with those of a husband much higher in social condition, who naturally desired that his wife should be, not only by nature but by education, fit for her future rank. He did not

trust himself to speak until in his great reasonableness he had attained entire composure, and could even agree to the expediency of additional instruction for his peerless child; and then, being but an erring man like other people, Stanfield's weakness of pride came into full operation, and even for the moment relieved his mind from that sense of utter disappointment with which he had listened to Roger's plan at first.

"Under conditions I might agree to it," he said; "which are, first, that you are not to raise money in any way you might be ashamed of afterwards. I will give Agnes five hundred pounds on her wedding-day; it's not a fortune, but it's a good bit of money to spend on an excursion. Take her abroad, since you've set your heart upon it, and show her all the places that are in books. I want no cloud upon my child's happiness; but after, you'll give me your word to bring her back. I do not say I'll settle so much on her, or I'll give her so much, but come back when you have had your holiday, and tell me your plans, and I'll do my best to make them possible. I have only her in the world, and I have something laid up for her. If you consent to this, I consent to the marriage. I consent to a year's holiday, Mr. Trevelyan; and then you'll come back to England, and once

more we'll talk over your plans, you and me. Life teaches a young man many lessons," said the blacksmith; "and Agnes and you will be more able then to form your notions alike, and know what your duties are together. There is my hand on the bargain; if you are pleased, so am I."

And Roger could do nothing but give his hand and his consent. To be sure, it would have been more satisfactory to know precisely what the blacksmith intended to give his daughter; and there was something in being thus sent off with his bride and five hundred pounds in his pocket for a year's holiday which was galling to the young man's pride. Still it was so much time gained, apart from any contact with the vulgar surroundings, which were so unfit for Roger Trevelyan's wife; and no one could tell what might happen in a year; and he himself was at his wit's end, and saw no other means of escape. It was all settled, when the young lover rushed upstairs three steps at a time to find Agnes, in all the triumph and delight of an expectant bridegroom; for, at all events, there were no complications in his love, though there were many in the arrangements of his opening life. Now, these serious questions could be postponed a little—only love, happiness, and satisfaction were to be in this holiday year.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mrs. Freke's Advice.

IT was with less satisfaction, however, that Roger replied to his sister's letter, which he had not destroyed, like Sir Roger's. He kept it without exactly knowing why; perhaps to prove her error to her, when his Agnes had made a triumphant entry into society; perhaps—but he did not question himself too closely; and Beatrice's six sheets of note-paper had only this brusque and decisive reply:—

"If you had known Agnes I could never have forgiven your letter—but you don't know her; and that is all the answer I make. Your arguments would be equally applicable to an angel out of heaven, if matters could be changed, and the sons of man could marry the daughters of God. I think my Agnes is the princess who has slept a hundred years. All that is best in

the world, even what you call society, belongs to her by nature. She will be my wife in about three weeks, I hope, and then we are going to Italy for a year's happiness before we enter upon more serious life; and, to show you a little the kind of people upon whom you decide so easily, this indulgence is the special desire of her good father. If you choose, you may inform Sir Roger that I burnt his letter, which is the only response I could make consistent with any shadow of respect on my side to the name of father. You will learn to understand better some day. In the meantime, I am very sorry for you in the companionship you have been forced into for so many years; and if I and my wife can be of use to you in the future, I have no doubt that she, as well as I, will be pleased.

"Always your brother,

"Roger Trevelyan."

This letter was written in the presence of Agnes, which may account for its elevation of tone. She, for her part, looked very wistfully at the epistle, thinking it might possibly have been shown to her before it was finally closed up, and wondering much what her lover said to his sister about herself. It chilled Agnes a little to see that, notwithstanding her inquiring look, the

envelope was fastened up without any reference to her. It was nearly the first jar of complicated sentiment she had felt. Was it that there was never to be any communication between her and Roger's nearest relatives? Was it that Miss Trevelyan had written of her in a way which Roger did not wish to meet her eyes? She began to think, and the beatific mist of happiness began to lift a little from the surrounding landscape. Roger, it is true, did not talk much of this unknown sister; but Agnes, with a womanly longing after the other woman who was nearest by blood and nature to her lover, had given many a wistful thought to Miss Trevelyan, and asked more questions about her than Roger was able to answer. Perhaps Beatrice "objected," like Sir Roger; perhaps she, though a woman, did not believe in love any more than he did; perhaps the sister had selected some impossible beauty, remote and magnificent, for her brother; and at this idea the heart of Agnes failed her a little. All at once it occurred to her, that in the bright world to which he was about to take her, there might be some one fairer, much more perfect than she, who, but for her, would have been Roger's wife, to the satisfaction of all his friends. This thought bore more and more heavily upon her the longer she kept it in her mind, and from thence there sprang

a new tenderness deeper and more delicate even than that first love of youth which she had given to him almost without knowing it. He was about to sacrifice himself for her. The pride which could not accept a sacrifice—the idea of self-assertion did not occur to Agnes. She had too little self-regard to make possible those stinging suggestions of *amour propre* which are natural to minds of a lower order. She thought humbly of herself, poor child, highly of him—all the more highly, as it began to dawn upon her, that for pure love her lover was capable of forfeiting distinctions and comforts known to her only in the vague splendours of imagination. The tears came to her eyes, but they were sweet tears. That he loved her enough to sacrifice the prejudices of his rank for her, was only one part of that bewildering yet subduing happiness; the great thing was that her Roger was one of the men who, for love and truth, are capable of sacrificing all things. Such was the visionary conclusion to which the visionary girl came in her innocence.

As for Agnes herself, *she* counted as next to nothing in the transaction; for she was possessed by that profoundest humility of disposition which does not recognise itself as humbleness, which springs from a temper of unbounded generosity, capable of giving all in its own person, and setting the goodness of others entirely

to their credit, as pure bounty, which she had never deserved, yet had a heart to receive largely and gratefully, to the honour of the giver. Such was the manner in which she received for the first time, as an actual conception of her own, this sense of difference between Roger and herself, and sacrifice on his part. When she went out in the afternoon about some ordinary business, her very steps seemed to shape themselves unconsciously to some great strain of music with which the whole world was thrilling; for naturally all the world had grown harmonious to her, for Roger's sake.

This was her state of mind when it happened to her to encounter Mrs. Freke, the wife of the Vicar, who had always taken an interest in Agnes. This good woman had no children of her own, and consequently had ceased to be quite *au courant* with the ideas of youth; and, at the same time, she had the proper prejudices of a gentlewoman, and had been sufficiently shocked by the extraordinary marriage which Roger Trevelyan was about to make, to be driven into a somewhat severe judgment of Agnes, notwithstanding her old interest in the blacksmith's pretty daughter. "Little artful thing!" Mrs. Freke said, notwithstanding her perfect consciousness that Agnes was, of all the girls in the village, the one least skilled in feminine wiles and artifices. When

she saw the unconscious victim approaching her, the Vicar's wife pounced across the road much as a furious cat might pounce upon the welcome but unexpected mouseling, which suddenly disturbed her meditations. "Just the very person I wanted to see," said Mrs. Freke. "How do you do, Agnes? I am going to see poor Mrs. Holden's baby, and, if you will walk with me part of the way, I shall like it so much. I want to talk to you, you know. I almost wonder you did not think of coming up to the Vicarage when all this happened, to ask my advice. I am always glad when young people in the parish treat me as a friend; and you know I have always taken such a great interest in *you*."

"Thank you," said Agnes. She was rather vexed to be disturbed in her own thoughts, and to have the music of the spheres suddenly broken up and put out of tune by this individual voice; but she turned dutifully all the same, and went softly in the opposite direction by her new companion's side.

"And you have no mother, poor thing!" Mrs. Freke continued. "I am always so sorry for a girl who has no mother. A man may be everything that is good and kind, but he never understands like a woman. If your mother had been living, Agnes, or even if you had come up to the

Vicarage, as you might have done, to ask my advice, I don't think that things would ever have gone so far."

Agnes lifted her eyes with a look of inquiry to the face of her adviser, startled a little, and wondering what she could mean. It was not the first time that Mrs. Freke had found out that the blacksmith's daughter had beautiful eyes; for the beauty of Agnes, which was beauty utterly unconscious and unthoughtful of itself, was of a kind which is always admired by women; but for the first time the Vicar's wife was in her turn a little startled by the disturbed look, by a momentary perception that, perhaps after all, those clear sweet eyes had a faculty of seeing, deeper and farther than her own. But she was old enough to be Agnes's mother, and recovered herself at once.

"Yes, my dear," she continued, with the slightest possible severity of tone, "I feel sure, if you had had a woman to advise you, that this would not have happened. I daresay you think I am very cruel to say so, and I daresay you think it's very fine to be married to a gentleman——"

"Mrs. Freke, what do you mean?" said Agnes.

"Just what I say, my dear," said the Vicar's wife, "what all the parish is saying. No doubt it is a great thing for a girl like you to secure Sir Roger Trevelyan's son; but I have always

given you credit for being a sensible girl, Agnes Stanfield; and I think, if it had been put before you in the right way, you would have seen that it is not nearly so fine a thing as it appears. Will you listen to me without darting off in a pet, if I show you all that is on the other side? I have always taken a great interest in you, and what I say is entirely for your good. Will you listen to me?"

"Surely," said Agnes, softly, half under her breath. She had a little of her father's tolerant nature, but only a little, being no more than twenty years old, and a woman; and this unexpected blow struck her as cruel. She would not let her mentor go on without a word of self-defence. "I have never thought of it being a fine thing," she said, faltering. "That has nothing to do with it. It was simply—I—Mr. Trevelyan——"

"Oh yes, I understand quite well," said Mrs. Freke. "I don't doubt in the least that you both think you are in love with each other; but listen to me, Agnes. When a man is once secured and engaged, you know, it's against his honour to draw back; but it is different with a woman. Now, please, just listen to me a little, and don't interrupt. Heaven knows I only speak for your good. It is always the easiest way not to inter-

fere; but when a girl is motherless, I always feel that it's my duty to advise her for her good, and if this marriage was to turn out unhappily, I never would forgive myself for not setting matters before you in their true light."

All this sudden light of unlooked-for revelation burst upon Agnes as she walked at a somewhat uncertain pace by Mrs. Freke's side along the long village street, which had the green on one side, and the ordinary population and occupations of Windholm on the other. This pace was uncertain, insomuch that Agnes, the younger and humbler of the two, had constantly to step aside and trip out of the way to let other people pass, thus interrupting much the important communication which was being addressed to her. All this, perhaps, diminished a little the solemnity of the counsel, but it did not lessen the effects of the suggestion thus conveyed to her mind. And now that her tranquillity was thoroughly disturbed, she was anxious to hear it all out.

"Perhaps you would come in and tell me the rest," she said, pausing as they passed her father's door.

"No, my dear, I cannot possibly go in; but come to Mattock Lane with me, it is quite quiet there," said Mrs. Freke, crossing the same road to which the blacksmith and the young squire

had betaken themselves for their consultation a few days before. It did not occur to her that what she had said and was about to say was of an agitating character, and that had Agnes been the daughter of the Vicar instead of the blacksmith, such an admonition would have been given to her in the most sheltered retirement, where the young lady would have had full latitude to weep or faint or remonstrate, as might be most agreeable to her. Agnes Stanfield was of a different order, and did not require these precautions; so Mrs. Freke quickened her pace, and led her victim without any compunctions into the quiet of Mattock Lane.

"My dear," she said, "I want to set it all before you in its true light. If it had been one of the young ladies at the Cedars, who was in your position, I should have been tempted to say almost the same thing; but with you, Agnes, there need be no pretences. I don't deny that you are justified in regarding it as a very great match. It may well turn the head of a girl like you, to think that you may one day be Lady Trevelyan, and lady of the manor here at Windholm, where you have been brought up so humbly. But, Agnes, though you think it so grand——"

Agnes made a little clutch at her companion's sleeve, in the impulse of passionate and indignant

vexation, which almost prevented her from speaking. "Why do you repeat *that*, when I tell you no?" she cried; "I don't think anything about grandeur—I would rather a thousand times he was like my father," cried Agnes, in the tumult of her thoughts; and then her candid heart checked her and her hand dropped from Mrs. Freke's sleeve; for, after all, she would not have preferred her lover to be like her father. Had he been like her father, he could not have been Roger Trevelyan; for the atmosphere of vague superiority which surrounded him had become in her eyes part of himself. Therefore she stopped short visibly, and her adviser took advantage of the pause.

"My dear, listen to me. I allow it is very tempting to a young creature like you to have all that offered to you; but there is a great deal to be said on the other side. In the first place, Mr. Trevelyan, if he marries you, will not receive another penny from Sir Roger as long as he lives —so that you will begin life as poor a young couple as could be found anywhere; and poverty in your present condition of life, my poor child, is a very different thing from the poverty of a gentleman, who has a position and appearance to keep up. Then in the second place," continued Mrs. Freke, who had been copying out a sermon for her husband only that morning, and had the pro-

fessional style still hanging about her, "instead of being petted and thought a great deal of, as you are at home, you will be entirely disowned and rejected by the family; Miss Trevelyan, I am sure, will never take the least notice of you, Agnes, nor any of the other relations; and wherever you go you will find that people are sorry for your husband for having married you, and look at you with unfriendly eyes for having inveigled him into it. I don't mean that I think so myself, my dear, but that is *always* how such things are regarded in the world. Then you will find yourself among people whom you cannot understand, and who cannot understand you; and they will find signs of low-breeding in everything you do and say, and in everything you don't do and say. Here everybody is fond of you and proud of you, for you are a very good girl, my dear, and a very superior girl, for your station in life; I don't hesitate to say so, because it is your due," added the Vicar's wife, authoritatively, "and you have too much sense to be vain about it; but when you are married everything will be quite different. You have no idea, brought up as you have been, how miserable a few fine ladies could make you; and then they would all take to pitying your husband; and perhaps—for there's no calculating on men—he

might be brought to pity himself, and to repent——"

"No more, please," said Agnes, who felt like a stupefied traveller caught in a sudden storm—the cruel words seemed to beat about her ears like hail, leaving their impression on her everywhere, but scarcely at this moment conveying anything but a vague general meaning to her mind. "No more, please," said Agnes, with a voice which did not seem to come from her throat, but rather from the stunned heart thus suddenly driven into a corner. She went on mechanically by her companion's side, even though, struck by compunction and remorse, Mrs. Freke had ceased to speak. They were still keeping the path which led past the long garden-wall of the Cedars; and it was the sound of merriment going on within, the laughter of the Miss Foxes over their game of croquet, rather than any reflection of her own, which awoke Agnes to a sense that the voice by her side had ceased. Then she came to herself a little. "If you have said all you have to say to me, I will go home," she said to her mentor. "My father does not like me to be out when he comes in to tea."

The Vicar's wife turned with her victim and took her hand. "You must not be angry with me, my dear," she said; "I meant it all for your

good, every word I have said, Agnes. You must not be angry with me."

"No," said Agnes, with the courtesy her father had reared her in—"no, I am sure you mean it all for good. Thank you, good-bye! Just now, I don't quite know what more to say."

"Good-bye, my dear. I hope you will think it all over; and, indeed, you must not think me cruel," said Mrs. Dalton, accompanying her back a few steps in her remorse. "If it had been any one else but you, who have so much right feeling—but you must not be angry with me."

Agnes gave her a smile of long-suffering politeness, as her only answer to this petition. Politeness itself, even when it attains that climax of consideration for the feelings of others, which was William Stanfield's ideal of "good manners," cannot force words to lips unable to pronounce them; but she could manage to smile until she had turned her back upon her counsellor, and was alone with her own heart and that world which had all crumbled to pieces under her feet, amid the calm domestic surroundings of Mattock Lane. As she went home, the mist and dust of this great demolition cleared off a little, and she began to understand what had been said. Agnes was her father's daughter, notwithstanding the difference which her womanhood and her youth

made between them. She could not take refuge in anger, or in the thought that her well-meaning adviser was her enemy, as most young women in her circumstances would have done. She was compelled by mere force of her nature to consider what had been said, without question of motive or thought of falsehood; and it was enough to strike any one dumb to see the entire world of imagination, of anticipation, overturned in a moment, and lying crumbling and smoking at her feet.

Now, however, that she had been thus rudely awakened, it seemed impossible to believe that a dream so profound and undisturbed could ever have possessed her. She could not even tell what foundation it was on which she had built that impossible idyl of love and life—for even now, when her eyes were opened, Agnes felt to the bottom of her heart that the looks of Roger were not always idyllic, but had been crossed by dark enough shadows even in these sunshiny days. Yet she, like every one else, like Roger himself, though, perhaps, he did it after a different fashion—like all of us, in our day; had been regarding that life of two—that existence which lay on the other side across the golden strand of marriage, as, at last, the impossible life about to commence, and, once for all, to be realized and made visible

among men; and it was this, and not a village girl's elation at marrying "a gentleman," which had been in Agnes's thoughts. Now, was it that her friend, who did it all for her good, had washed the fairy chrism out of the girl's eyes at once and for ever? She who had rejoiced to see in her lover the generous nobleness of a man who preferred love to self-interest, was it, on the contrary, she who was dragging him down, who was doomed to drag him down all the days of her life? to make him pitied by his equals, abandoned by his friends —to reduce him to poverty in the first place, and to shame afterwards, when all the great ladies, as Mrs. Freke said, would look contemptuously on his low-bred wife? Agnes's heart swelled as if it would have burst, and then the strength as of a giant came into her delicate frame. Suddenly she felt within herself a sense of power such as sometimes, bought with many pangs, reassures the soul in a moment of suffering. She, at least, could make all sacrifices, could endure all things, could suffer in his stead; and it was with this thought, that through the ruins of the world, and encompassed by the mist and dust of the earthquake, Agnes went, like all the others, to see her father, and hear what he had to say.

CHAPTER XIX.

Her Share.

IT was late, and the men were leaving the forge when Agnes entered under the archway. The blacksmith himself stood at the smithy-door ready to lock it up, and enter the house as usual. When he saw his daughter coming across the yard, the slow light that came gradually over his face like a sun-rising woke in his broad brown eyes.

"Where have you been, little one?" he said; and it was not until after he had asked the question that he saw any traces of unusual emotion in his daughter's looks.

"I don't quite know where I have been, father," said Agnes; and she came in and sat down, with a look of weariness, on a little bench just inside the door; and then a smile, which looked like a reflection from his own, came over her face. "I want your advice," she said; "I

seem to have lost my way somehow; father, I want you to tell me what to do."

The blacksmith felt his heart stir in his breast with a strange mixture of fear and hope, but he would not let any sign of his roused expectation appear in his face.

"Many a one comes here on the same errand," he said; "but it is new for you, little one, to ask advice—it is odd to hear such words out of your lips. I suppose it's because I've been used to tell you what to do without asking," said the strong man, who was moved to weakness by the thought; and he put his hand upon her head and caressed and smoothed down, almost without knowing it, her beautiful hair.

"Yes," said Agnes, with her eyes fixed upon her hat, which she had in her hand; "but now it is time for me to take the responsibility on myself, father. I am old enough. I want to ask you something. It is about—and yet it is not altogether about—Mr. Trevelyan." She raised her eyes when she uttered Roger's name, and looked her father in the face without flinching. Her colour rose a little, but only a little. It was not the moment either for tears or blushes. Most people who came to Stanfield for advice came with an eager desire to be advised to take their own way; but Agnes meant to know what was

right without any immediate reference either to the cause or to the issue. She put down her hat on her knee, and kept her eyes steadfastly on her father's face. They were putting a still more effectual, still more earnest question—reading the answer by anticipation, while still her lips had not finished asking. "I want you to tell me," she went on, "what is the truth about unequal marriages. When there is a great difference between two people, is it true that they are not happy? I mean, when it is the woman who is the inferior. But then," said Agnes, changing into the argument that struck her, "in books it is always said that the woman is best to be a little inferior. I do not understand it myself. I don't see why it should make a difference. I want you to tell me exactly what you think."

"My little one," said Stanfield, more and more moved as he looked at her, "who has been talking this cruel stuff to you?"

"Oh, never mind," said Agnes, "that does not matter; the only thing of any importance is to know whether it is true."

And then the two, who were so like each other, and yet so unlike, paused mutually, looking at each other; for Stanfield this time felt his election as universal counsellor too much for him. It is hard for a man to be called upon to enlighten

his own child, especially when her happiness, or what she considers her happiness, is at stake.

"Because," said Agnes, who was still in the first disturbed and argumentative stage of her new light, "I don't see how it should be so. I suppose my mother did not think herself or any one else in the world your equal, father; she would not have been happy if she had. She must have believed you the best and highest in the world. To be sure she was right," the girl continued, following out her own thread of thought by an illustration most natural, yet which went to her father's heart; "but when that was the case, what did it matter which was the richest? Rich or poor could make no difference. She could not have been happy," said Agnes, fixing her eyes on her father's face as if appealing to him for the truth of what she said, "if she had not known that there was no one else equal to you——"

"Stop, little one, stop—don't speak like that to me," said the father, from whom all power of remonstrance or reasoning had been taken by this unexpected address; "your mother was different——"

"No," said Agnes, "I did not know her, it is true; and yet you may be sure I do know her, for was not I her only child? God is not so

hard upon people as he seems," said the young philosopher. "I have felt often that thoughts came to me when I was alone without my knowing it—and who could bring them but my mother? She knew you were better than all the rest. If you had been a duke, I do not see what difference it could have made; for do you not see, father, if you had not been more than a duke, more than a king, the man that was best in the world, she never could have been so happy; and after that, what did it matter what you were?"

All this Agnes uttered with calmness, as if it were a perfectly stable and effectual argument, and one which must be as clear to the candour of her hearer as to herself; while through all there was such an inference of the character of her own love and expectations as smote her father to the heart.

"Agnes," he said, "your mother was not like you. Maybe I'm too partial to my child; but if it was in her to be like you, she never lived to open it up. She looked up to me, as was natural; but I was young then, and no wiser than my neighbours. Hush! little one. Tell me, are you going into life with that thought in your mind? I don't say but there may be great unhappiness in unequal marriages, but there is no inequality so great as to have in your heart an

idea like that, and then to wake up and find yourself sitting opposite an ordinary man."

Agnes smiled, and a faint, sweet colour flushed for a moment over her features, like the reflection of some passing light.

"You know most things better than I do," she said—"almost everything, father—only not one thing; I know that best."

William Stanfield stood in despair before his child, who had come to consult him on the grand decision of her life. She was disturbed and anxious at the present moment about circumstances which gave him comparatively little anxiety, but she was altogether confident and secure on the other hand about the chief matter of all—the question which caused him more inquietude than anything else in his life. And it was evidently vain to attempt to convince Agnes that Roger Trevelyan was not, as she said in her shy romance, embodying herself in her mother, the man that was best in the world.

"When you put limits to me, it shows you have no such great faith in me," said the blacksmith, smiling, with all his heart in his eyes. "When folks come here in a general way, they take for granted I'm good for everything—and at the worst, I'm never so stupid but what I can understand what they want me to say; but you,

little one, I'm at a loss with you. I've told you the kind of inequality I'm most afeard of; when one, be it man or woman, builds up an image in their mind of another human creature and kneels down before it; and the rains descend and the winds blow, like in the Bible, and the image falls to pieces — that's the kind of inequality that troubles me."

"Yes," said Agnes, softly, "but that is not what I asked you about." And then there was another pause, for just then Agnes's mind came to the end of the argumentative phase, and plunged at once into the darkness of doubt and disquietude. "If it was to make a man be given up by his friends and pitied by everybody that knew him—if it was to take away all he had and give him nothing, or so little, in return—father, what would it be a woman's duty to do?"

When she had said these words Agnes did what an honest seeker of counsel does so often—she forestalled the advice she asked and convinced herself without waiting for it; and having done so found it impossible to attend to the answer she demanded, and buried her face in her hands.

"A woman who is strong enough for such a thought would be strong enough to bear what-

ever there was to bear," said the blacksmith; but after that his lips were closed—he could not tell how. He could advise others—he could not advise his child. The responsibility was too great, the issue too momentous. He cleared his throat again and again, and essayed to speak; but it was all useless. It was the first of all the conferences he had had on this subject in which his heart and power failed him. It is true he had yielded to Roger Trevelyan, but he had done it voluntarily, because the one great argument in his favour, the happiness of Agnes, was stronger than all the arguments that could be advanced against him. But with Agnes herself Stanfield lost his faculty altogether. He stood looking at her with the grieved and conscious impotence of a love which would willingly have borne any tortures in the world rather than harm "a hair of her head." But he could not guide his daughter through this hard passage. And besides, she had escaped from him and was fighting her battle by herself, shut up within herself, with her hair drooping over the small hands in which her face was hidden. Stanfield stood by watching the struggle with unspeakable anxiety, yet as helpless as the most ordinary and dull of men. And as for Agnes, she had forgotten the question she asked, and was herself resolving her difficulty as

if it had been at the sword's point. Such moments pass swiftly, slow as they appear. When she raised her head, the light, which was waning, had scarcely had time to change; but her face, which was always pale, had in that minute become wan like the face of a spirit.

"Yes," she said, "I think that is the right thing to do; I cannot think of anything else. If it were only me, I should not mind; but you see he has to be considered every way, father," she continued, looking up in his face with a tender confidence which it broke his heart to see, "both for his happiness now and his happiness then; but I think that is the only thing to do."

Stanfield did not ask what it was on which she had thus decided. He only took her little cold hand and held it fast and close in his own.

"Come in, little one; it is time to go home," he said.

Perhaps she thought he had suggested the idea which had risen in her own mind; perhaps she trusted in the entire sympathy between them to explain without words what she meant to do. Anyhow, he neither asked nor did she answer any question. He took her in without any further words, looking at her wistfully now and

then, as women often look at a man, but as men seldom look at a woman. It was she in whose hands the action rested for the moment; up to this time she had been, though so deeply involved, only a kind of spectator of the little drama. Now, and suddenly, she had found herself out to be one of the principals, and the action for the moment was in her hands.

CHAPTER XX.

End of the Struggle.

THIS was the first lifting of the veil which, up to this moment, had lain bright, but impenetrable, upon the life which awaited Agnes, and to which she was going forward with so much confidence, when the Vicar's wife lent a gleam of her superior wisdom to lighten the darkness. It would be difficult to tell how the night was spent after the conference which has just been recorded. The young heroine was not, up to this time, tearful or heart-broken; on the contrary, her eye was bright with excitement, her manner much more eager and less tranquil than usual. That side of the matter which concerned herself had not, as yet, come home to her; when the sacrifice was made, and the separation had taken place, there would be time enough to think of that. In the meantime, however, the sense of impending trouble did not weigh upon Agnes. She was very pale, but it was the paleness of

active thought—of that conflict of imagination which naturally, in a mind like hers, pervades every actual struggle.

Thus she sat silent over her work all the evening, going over involuntarily the scene that was to take place next morning, and laying up arguments from everything that occurred around her: the domestic incidents which she saw without seeing them, and which somehow seemed to impress themselves to-night upon some inner sense, which required no active aid from eyes or ears. Thus, for example, though her eyes were bent upon her work, and her whole mind absorbed in the one great question, Agnes had never before conceived so vivid an idea of her stepmother—of all that was known of her, and all that was not known—of her manners and aspect, and curious incongruity with everything immediately surrounding her. This woman, often so repulsive to herself, was to be by her means brought into close relationship with Roger Trevelyan, whose natural place was in that society which Agnes had read of in books. Could such a thing be possible? And then the parlour itself, which was so comfortable and so pleasant, began to explain itself to the mind of the girl, and read her a silent homily. How different it was even from the simple drawing-room at the Vicarage; how totally different from those

fairy apartments in novels, where even poverty was made lovely by grace and refinement! There was no poverty in the blacksmith's sitting-room, a fact which made it all the more evident that there was no loveliness. The blacksmith's daughter had received from nature a singular gift of refinement in her own mind and person, but it is not easy to throw that "air of grace," which is so universal in books, over the honest mahogany and damask, or possibly haircloth, of a respectable tradesman's house; and from that consideration of still life Agnes further drew the consciousness that, up to this moment, the parlour had entirely contented her, and had not seemed to lack anything, and that she, in short, had not had any training in the elegancies of life, nor felt any need of them, until her eyes were thus summarily opened.

Thoughts like these when they commence make rapid progress; such dread prose in everything surrounding her; such dull, downright ungraceful respectability—everything so good, and substantial, and tradesmanlike, how was it possible that Roger Trevelyan could ever have forgotten himself so far as to seek admittance there? The more she thought of it the clearer it grew; and unconsciously she put her determination into words, and imagined his reply, and went through all the exciting momentous inter-

view. Other incipient lights, strange and new, gleamed about Agnes as she rushed into this conflict of fancy, as if her good angel had been making all the attempts possible to tear asunder for good the impenetrable curtain of light which veiled her future. Though she had made, only an hour or two before, her touching confession of faith in her betrothed, as "first of men," yet in this imaginary struggle between herself and her lover it was not possible but that Roger must take the secondary place. She made him protest, she made him remonstrate, she made him vow that his love was more to him than anything else in the world; but yet in her present condition of mind it was inevitable that she should win the victory, and, accordingly, she made him submit at the last, and withdraw, leaving her heartbroken indeed, but in the higher position of the two, and with just a thrill of possible contempt for the man who could be persuaded to accept her sacrifice.

Such were the imaginations, the impressions—for it would be vain to call them thoughts—which gleamed through her mind as she sat at work through the long evening. Was it a vague intuition of what might be, a faint, far-off suggestion of danger, breathed into her mind as Agnes, in her tender, girlish fancy, had thought

at other times, by the mother, whom, perhaps, God had not altogether separated from her child? The same gleams of prescient fancy went with her into her sleep, weaving strange dreams, in which Roger was always at fault, she could not tell how.

Yet, amid all this, though it is strange to say so, Agnes was not miserable. She was excited about the battle that she had to fight; and besides, at bottom, though she was not aware of it, there was a traitor in the camp. All this vivid sense of the difference between herself and her lover—all this determination to sacrifice herself for his sake—were utterly true and real; and yet, underneath all, by some strange complication only known to the heart, there lay a certain scepticism—the merest chance or possibility that truth might turn out falsehood, and reality prove a fiction. Agnes had come to one of those moments of life in which miracles of every description seem far more probable and likely to happen than ordinary events; perhaps that was why, with the fullest intention to make herself wretched, and relinquish all that she considered happiness in this sweet opening of her personal existence, she was not in reality miserable, but only profoundly excited, feeling within herself a certain commotion and eleva-

tion which had never occurred before in her youthful life.

And here, again, the young heroine had her father at a disadvantage. He saw the gravity of the position—the possible heartbreak of his child; and he did not at all suspect the secret hope, unknown even to herself, which gave her a furtive and unacknowledged support. He went out to his forge in the morning with a heavy heart. Perhaps, indeed, as things appeared at the moment, he might retain his child; but if it were at the cost of her happiness, what good would it do him? And Stanfield went sadly to his work, leaving the matter in the hands of those whom it most concerned. His daughter had ceased to be the child for whom he could decide; now it was needful that she should decide for herself.

When Roger Trevelyan entered the blacksmith's parlour that morning, he perceived at a glance that Agnes had "something on her mind;" but what that something might be—beyond, perhaps, a difficulty with the odious stepmother, whom he could not bear to see in the same room with her—or some pleasant embarrassment as to the future, which it would be his office to clear away—the young man had not a suspicion. She was alone, and she had her

work as usual; but not as usual were the eyes, no longer dreamy, but full of unusual energy and light, which she raised to him, and the indescribable air of having something to say, which was in her whole manner and aspect. She had scarcely patience to-day for the greetings, which were pleasant enough on other occasions. She pointed out his chair to him, which she had placed opposite herself, in readiness for the great interview, which had already been rehearsed so often in her own mind; and when he sat down, feeling a little surprised and checked, he saw for the first time, by the light which fell full on her from the window, the unusual pallor of Agnes's face.

"How pale you are!" cried the young man. "Are you sure you are quite well, Agnes? Somehow, you do not look yourself to-day—you have been vexed or worried by some one. I am sure you are not well."

"Oh yes, quite well," said Agnes. "I am a little more than myself, that is what it is. I have got so much to say to you. Do sit down, please, and let me speak."

"What is the matter?" said Roger, in dismay.

"It is only that I have a great deal to say to you," she said, with a little haste and eagerness. "Mr. Trevelyan, I have had a long dream, but

I wakened up out of it last night. I have been very near doing you a great injury without knowing it; and I am very thankful that I have found it out before it is too late."

"A great injury!" said the young lover, looking at her aghast—"is it that you do not love me, Agnes? I will not believe you if you tell me *that*."

"There are more things in the world than love," said Agnes, with solemnity. "That is often disappointed; and sometimes, you know—sometimes it does not last. I was not speaking of love. I do not ask you to believe—anything—that is not true. But this is true, and you must listen to me. Do not be so cruel as to interrupt me. Go back to your seat, and hear what I have to say. I have been thinking it over all the night. One cannot help the feelings that come into one's heart," said Agnes, making an effort to go on with her work. "Things come before one knows; but everybody can help the acts they do," she continued, suddenly lifting up her face. "I do you no harm by—by thinking of you within myself; but going to church and being married would be a sin."

"A sin?" repeated Roger, with utter amaze and bewilderment in his face.

"Yes, because it would be doing you a great injury," said the young heroine, who in her in-

nocence had studied her part, and made up her little speech. "Look round, Mr. Trevelyan, and see how different everything is from what you are used to. It is not that we are poor. If we were quite poor, it would scarcely be so bad, perhaps. We are so comfortable, and I—I am quite content with it, you know. If I were unhappy, and wished for something better, it would not be so bad. And then there is my father, whom I am proud of—if he was not so good and such an honour, you might take me away and forget him; but now it can never be concealed that he is only a blacksmith, though he is good enough to be a king. Don't interrupt me," cried the trembling orator, already getting too excited to remember her own premeditated eloquence—"oh, don't interrupt me, please. It is because we are not good enough and not bad enough that it would be a sin. If I had been a beggar-girl, it would have been a romance, and you might have done it; or, like Griselda, that you read to me about; it is because we are so much below you, and yet—and yet——.' Here the speech broke down utterly, and came to an abrupt conclusion, not in tears, but in a sudden spasm, which closed her throat and made it impossible, for the moment, to utter another word.

"And yet so much above me—did you mean

to say?" cried the impatient lover. "I will give in to that. Who has put this nonsense in your head? No; I will not keep sitting thus in the stocks, looking at you. Why should I? It is too late to set me up like a target and fire into me. Agnes, what does it mean?"

This was not in the least the answer she had put into his mouth in her thoughts, and then her hands were held fast, which she had not contemplated; and things can be said when people are face to face, in a natural attitude of opposition, which change their character strangely when the antagonists are side by side, and as close to each other as is conveniently attainable. Thus somehow even her thoughts and intentions oozed out of Agnes's heart without any will of her own.

"Oh, Roger, you know what it means," she said. "I could die to do you any good or pleasure, but I cannot do you an injury. I never, never, will consent to do you an injury! You will be cast off by your father and your friends, and the people you live among. Oh, Roger, let me go!"

"I will never let you go," said the young man, "not if you were twenty times right, instead of being altogether wrong. Do you know what my father is, Agnes? I could not

tell you, but I don't care much if I never saw him again; and the people I ought to live among would let me perish before any of them would lift a finger. Is it for them you would give me up? Pshaw! you are only a woman, after all," cried the lover in his triumph; "always going back to the foundation, and trying to pluck it up with your hands—such morsels of hands, too; good for nothing in this world, that I can see, but to be kissed and have rings put upon them. The one I can do now, the other must be done as soon as possible. Listen, I have seen Mr. Freke this morning; so that is all settled," said Roger. "Now, get your hat and come out—it is the only thing to blow the vapours away."

"They are not vapours," cried Agnes. "Mr. Trevelyan, you must listen to me. I have not said half what I have to say."

"I will listen to you on the Common, among the gorse bushes," said Roger, "where I once listened to you before. If you were ever so eloquent, you could not improve what you said that day, Agnes. Come along. If this is how you employ your evenings, Stanfield must withdraw his interdict. You shan't be left to plot against me by night. Come, come, there is nothing like the fresh air and the winds to blow this nonsense away."

This was much how the memorable attempt ended. She kept up the struggle a little longer, it is true, but she found nothing new or more convincing to say, and obeyed him at last, and went to get her hat, with a heart not quite satisfied, and yet overflowing with happiness. Almost the moment she left him, Roger, without being aware of it, looked round the room as she had bidden him, and recognised the truth of what she had said. Not that he made any effort to postpone that glance until she should be gone; for by this time the young man had so set his heart on having his own way, that Reason herself in proper person could not have kept him from it. But when he felt sure of having overcome her, and when she was gone, he did look round the parlour, and drew a long breath as he did so. It was quite true what Agnes had said. It was horribly respectable and comfortable—not poor, but a thousand times worse than poor; a kind of house that there would be little hope of getting rid of thoroughly. He gave a slight impatient sigh at the thought; but if he was angry at any one, it was only at Providence, which had neglected to make Agnes rich, and of a good family. That was all the length he went in those early days, and her little protest and resistance made him

all the more determined on having his own way. They went out together, after a while, and wandered across the Common and into the neglected park, and through wonderful enchanted countries of imagination besides—Agnes altogether vanquished, happier than usual, though, in the midst of her happiness, she could not help feeling a thrill in one corner of her heart, as of a wound that had been or might be, it was impossible to say which. And that was the last effort made to stop the marriage, which now was all arranged and settled, and came nearer and nearer, with steady resolute steps, as it appeared to Agnes every night and every day.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Marriage.

HE day of the marriage of this couple, whom everybody felt to be so ill-matched, was a day of May, an ideal day for a wedding. The summer was early that year, and the hawthorn blossoms were already on the hedges to justify their familiar name. A breath of fragrance came and went about the village of Windholm with every air that blew, from the lilac in the cottage gardens, which had not faded yet, and from the May that began to flourish in the lanes; and now and then a truant breeze, more lively than usual, brought a little shower of snowy petals from the apple-trees over the garden walls. It was still the season when everything looked hopeful. The early flush of spring had not sunk into that first decadence almost more sad to see than the decay of autumn, which strikes all the blossoming shrubs in the brightness of the

season; and the great lime-trees fluttered their delicate leaves softly in a sweet silence of expectation over the honey-blooms to come. It was under those lime-trees that Agnes Stanfield passed on her wedding-morning, and all Nature seemed to smile at her, and fling blessings and promises upon her downcast head. Every bride is a type of all brides, and appeals more or less to a sympathy more universal than any individual dislike or objection; and no figure could have typified better the new hope of the world—the new generation beginning—than that of Agnes, out of whose eyes, when they were visible by glimpses, there came such a wistful, sweet demand for sympathy, as few people could resist. She was shy by nature, and was now as downcast and "shame-faced" as any poet could have desired; but hers was the wistful timidity which appeals, and not the scared self-conscious shyness that defies sympathy. But it was only those immediately surrounding her to whom her downcast eyes gave now and then that momentary glimpse into the depths. As for the crowd which filled the church, the bride was unconscious of them; no vulgar murmur came to her ear when they led her out again clothed in her new name and office. She was absorbed not in her happiness so much as in a strange separation and withdrawal from herself. Few people are overpoweringly happy on their

wedding-day. Most women at least, like Agnes, stand for that one moment in their lives apart, and look at themselves, and are spectators of the wonderful crisis. To be sure, there are personages, lively and energetic, to whom this strange, sweet pause of being is unnecessary, and who do not lose their identity for a moment; but then, as we have already said, Agnes Stanfield was an ideal bride.

And altogether it was a strange wedding. If she had married a man of her own condition, all the worthiest people of their class in Windholm would naturally have done honour to the wedding; but, under the circumstances, a wedding-party of Windholm folks, all smiling and congratulatory, would have been more than the bridegroom was equal to. He had so far gained a victory over himself as to call from town one friend, upon whom he could rely to support him on the occasion—a Cornwall man and neighbour at home, the same Fred Pendarves to whose care Beatrice had recommended her brother when she applauded his wise intention of leaving the Hall, without any explanation with Agnes. Pendarves was a young man of exemplary gravity, going in for public life, and already in Parliament, and bent upon making his way—a rising man, sure and steady, who observed everything and said little, and was a safe friend for that or any other

emergency. He stood by Roger during the ceremony of his marriage as he might have stood by him had he been put upon his trial for some capital offence, maintaining in the one case, as he would have done in the other, for his friend's interest, a discreet silence. Besides Pendarves, the party consisted only of Stanfield, of Polly Thompson—the niece of the Miss Thompsons, whose school Agnes had attended, a girl entirely devoted to the blacksmith's daughter, but who was awed into silence by the magnificent position in which she found herself; and Mrs. Freke, the Vicar's wife, who, a little remorseful after her remonstrance, had made up matters by offering for this eventful day to take the place of the bride's mother. Mrs. Stanfield, who had been much subdued since her unsuccessful interview with Roger, shrinking from his presence, and carefully abstaining from anything that could attract his notice, had, by a wonderful act of self-denial, declined to be present, to the great amazement but secret relief of the blacksmith. Such was the little group which surrounded the altar, where Mr. Freke himself stood, in a little excitement, making reflections which may be hereafter submitted to the reader. Roger, in the height of his triumph, receiving Agnes and his own way at the same supreme moment, and full of natural excitement and a little agitation, was

less troubled, fortunately, by the complication of his circumstances at this hour than he had ever been; but for the four people who stood behind these two, their feelings were various enough to bear distinct recording.

As for Stanfield himself, a sadness which he could not shake off possessed him—a kind of soft and pensive shadow of what he might have felt had it been the burial instead of the marriage of his daughter, at which he held his place. It was a farewell scarcely less solemn he was saying. If the blacksmith could deceive himself by times in respect to the future, and imagine his son-in-law seeking his society and taking his advice, that pleasant delusion did not serve him at this moment. He saw his child going, fearless and ignorant, into a world almost as unknown to him as the world on the other side of the grave, and in which he could give her no help or guidance; and he saw, what was a lesser matter, his own life lying barren and solitary, no longer to be sweetened by the one sole creature in the world who had been entirely his own. He stood with his calm, brown eyes dwelling upon his child, and his lips just touched with a smile which was more pathetic than tears; feeling no positive anguish, but a sense of infinite languor, sadness, a kind of dissolution. The sunshine was about to die

off from him, and here he stood in its last rays, trying to make the most of them, and to take pleasure in the sight of her happiness, although it was not happiness for him.

And beside Stanfield stood the maiden Polly, whose excitement was past describing, whose eyes were dancing, whose cheeks were burning, whose innocent little soul was wound up to such a pitch of fright and ecstasy, that only the awe of the place she was in, and of her immediate companions there, kept her from hysterical laughter and tears. Polly's white frock brushed now and then the spotless habiliments of Mr. Pendarves, who was in Parliament, and might be prime minister, for anything the little maiden knew. What if it might some time come to Polly's turn to make a great marriage, as Agnes was doing!—what if anything so magnificent as the upright figure by her side might some day fall to Polly's share, and the little village maid be translated into a vague paradise of silk dresses and jewels, and balls and theatres! Such a suggestion was inevitable to the proximity in which she found herself, and Polly accordingly was much less able to take care of herself and her little momentary duties than Agnes was, who gave her a glance of kind warning at the crisis of affairs, when the excitement had become too much for her. Mrs. Freke, possessed by very

different sentiments, stood behind this little hysterical creature, disposed sometimes to give her "a good shake," and bring her to her senses, for who was she that she should put her little shoulders up, and show intentions of sobbing over a matter which concerned her so little? Any absurd exhibition of "feelings" on Polly's part was naturally too much for the patience of any one capable of appreciating the true aspect of affairs.

Mrs. Freke was a good woman, although in her zeal she had been a little hard upon Agnes. She stood saying to herself, "Poor thing! poor thing!" with a true and tender pity for the innocent bride. "She will be sure to meet hard usage in the family and in the world, and how will she bear it?" the kind woman said to herself; not knowing much, it was true, of Agnes, except as a daughter adored by her father, and brought up in the village as a thing apart. The Vicar's wife knew nothing more of the bride than that she was sensitive and delicate of mind to a degree almost unknown in her station. She saw the grace of the lily and the fragile looks, and did not recollect that by times grace is only the cloak and garment of strength; therefore she said in her heart, "Poor thing! poor thing!" and looked on with pity at the marriage. As for Mr. Pendarves, he was not a man to waste his august

thoughts on such an affair. Any feeling that struck him after the first shock of amazement and pity (though such words are infinitely too strong to express the moderate and well-controlled sentiments of the young statesman), was a bland curiosity as to the customs and habits of the lower classes in respect to such an important ceremony as marriage, which afforded him some slight compensation for his trouble. Such a study was always in the way of his art, and might come in, who could tell? in some speech upon the marriage-laws of New Zealand or Timbuctoo.

Behind the immediate circle which was animated by feelings so different, the church was filled with a curious miscellaneous audience, equally varied in their sentiments. Half the female population of Windholm had come to see Agnes married—some with a touch of womanly sympathy, but most with the lively and virtuous disapprobation of a crowd which suddenly sees one of its members, without any sufficient reason, elevated over its head. The Miss Foxes, from the Cedars, were in their family pew, looking on from a dignified distance, the eldest shaking her head, now and then, with such an air of sympathetic gloom as might have become a grand-duchess compelled to assist at a ceremony by which a prince of the blood demeaned himself to

a peasant; the middle one in mischievous spirits, talkative and satirical, and now and then falling back behind her sisters in fits of suppressed laughter as the absurdity of the matter struck her. The youngest, on the contrary, who had once half imagined herself in love with Roger, gave way to a few tears, and looked at the bride with a sentimental longing to become immediately her bosom friend and guardian angel, and teach her "how to make him happy." And the Miss Foxes were tolerable types of the audience in general. When the bride and bridegroom made their way out of church, they did not meet the congratulatory countenances common on such occasions. No flowers, neither real nor imaginary, were scattered in their way. A little natural sympathy, a great deal of virtuous pity, much curiosity and wonder, were in the faces of the spectators. The two who went down the aisle together, radiant in youth, and hope, and happiness, were about to work out a great problem for the amusement and edification of the public; and the public did not feel itself called upon on this, as on most occasions, to veil its curiosity and scepticism under the ordinary disguise of smiles. Fortunately, neither the bridegroom nor bride were in the least degree the wiser; they had love, at least, the one great

primitive foundation to build happiness upon, and neither of them had any doubts upon that subject. So they went off from the church-door, leaving a world of speculations behind them, and in an hour after had carried their problem out of Windholm into the great indifferent world.

"Harriet," said Mr. Freke, "don't talk to me about Providence; I don't understand Providence, I tell you. Lord bless us! what a horrible mistake. It's all very well to talk of Sir Roger Trevelyan's son, and so forth. What do you imagine men and women were made for?—that's the question. I was in twenty minds to stop the marriage myself, and say I knew of an impediment. Good life! what a mistake marriage is!"

"That is not very flattering to me, Mr. Freke," said his wife.

"Pshaw! you know I don't mean you, though you do talk great nonsense sometimes. I don't want to go against the Articles and so forth; but if that sort of thing is all that Providence can do, I'll go and read Robertson's sermon 'On the Illusions of Life;' not that I approve of Robertson's sermon, mind you," said the Vicar, turning round as he reached the door. "So far as I can make out, he represents God to be pretty nearly deceiving us for our good, which is a

view of the matter I never will give in to. But, good heavens! when one has just come from a business like this!"

"What do you object to in it?" asked Mrs. Freke; a question which roused her husband into a momentary boundless fury.

"What I object to? Everything!" he said. "That girl, if she had waited a year or two, would have found it out. The lad is at the height of his growth at this moment; to do him justice, he'll never be so near her equal again as he is to-day. From this moment he begins to go down again; and she has just commenced growing; that's what I object to. In a year or two, she'll be driven to find it out."

"Mr. Freke," said his wife, with calm exasperation, "if you say that to anybody but me, people will think you mad."

"Very likely, my dear," said the Vicar; "people have thought me mad before now. It don't do me any harm; but as for calling that *Providence*, you know! I'm much inclined to the idea of dualism myself: I can't help thinking *down below* has something to do with it. Half the things that happen in the world look as if the devil had sanctioned them, and not God."

"Mr. Freke," said his wife, this time with more solemnity, "if you talk like that to

anybody but me, people will think you an infidel."

At which the Vicar gave a short laugh.

"Very likely," he said. "People have called me all sorts of names before now; but I take off my surplice before I go into the pulpit, and I never have any candles on the altar, so I don't see what harm they can do me. Besides, there's nothing infidel about it. Things may occur in the world, from the clash of the opposing forces, like—like electricity, you know," said Mr. Freke, who was a little uncertain in his scientific illustrations; "there is nothing in the Bible against that. Of course she'll come out of it like a queen, that girl will; but why, why, Harriet, once in a while, a pretty young creature like that—a creature that *could* be happy—why mightn't she have her happiness? I don't say we all deserve it; but once in a way——"

"Mr. Freke, you are going out of your senses," said his wife. "Agnes Stanfield is only the blacksmith's daughter; and *he* is a gentleman very well educated, and very nice, and as much in love with her as a man need be. It's quite a romance, on the contrary; and if she is not happy she will be the most ungrateful woman on the face of the earth."

The Vicar made no special answer to this

address. He only shook his head and thrust his arms up to the elbows into the pockets of his long black coat, and said, "Poor thing, poor thing!" as he made one little circuit round the room preparatory to leaving it, as was his custom. When he was gone his wife laid down her knitting and leaned back in her chair. She was not a woman to give in to the lawless sentiments of her husband, but when he was out of the way she could abandon herself to her own thoughts; and she too said "Poor thing!" in her heart, and perhaps wondered—though with a mild feminine wonder, which suffered itself no such daring expression as that which the clergyman, treating the subject with professional boldness, felt himself free to venture on—why proceedings so strangely against all human likelihood of well-doing should be "permitted," as she said. Perhaps it was a point of view peculiar to the clerical house.

But the discontent of Windholm was general, though otherwise expressed. "If one could have the least hope that she would make him happy!" little Miss Fox said, with a sigh; and as for Polly Thompson, though she was asked out to tea every night for a fortnight, on the score of her bridesmaid-honours, a sense that she was disapproved of was conveyed early and distinctly to her mind in the first week. "She may be grand, but

she'll be none happy; it ain't in reason," was the judgment of Mrs. Roger, the baker's wife, whose opinion was held in esteem in Windholm; "and if I were you, Miss Polly, I wouldn't say no more than I could help on the subject;" which, to be sure, was rather hard upon the poor girl, who had been plied with all manner of questions for two hours previously. It was amid this commotion of public opinion that Agnes left the home which perhaps she might never see again. Stanfield stood at his door, looking after the carriage which contained his daughter, with a countenance from which the light seemed to have gone out, and eyes which, in their dumb anguish, were more and more like the eyes of Juno. It seemed to him that he had bidden his child farewell for ever and ever. Never on earth, scarcely even in heaven, if human ties counted for anything then, could she be his again. And in the meantime the bride, having made acquaintance over again with herself and regained her identity, was beginning her first voyage, in utter confidence and fearlessness, into the unknown life.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Wedding Tour.

ROGER TREVELYAN took his bride to Switzerland, where they wandered about among the mountains all the summer. He was very much in love, and very much enchanted with the love and admiration of Agnes, to whom, at this period, he seemed the exponent of everything most lovely and most marvellous in nature. Her mind, it is true, was of a much higher order than his to start with, but, after all, the advantages of education count for something; and a girl brought up in Windholm in the blacksmith's parlour, with very little means of access to books, and with a horizon which enclosed little more than the village common and the fields, must have inevitably found a great deal unknown to her in the mind and recollections of any man, not a fool, who had gone through a gentleman's education; and the very elevation of Agnes's mind by nature prevented her from finding her superiority out;

for she was like her father, destitute of cleverness, and had no pretensions to any powers of penetration. It never occurred to her to measure any one, or compare herself with others; and Roger, who had seen all these glories before, who knew where to lead her to catch the most perfect combination at every wonderful point of view, and who knew, besides, many things to say about these points of view which a woman of his own class would have laughed at as hackneyed, but which were new to Agnes, could not fail to appear to his bride, in her ignorance, like a superior being.

And as her faith in him and admiration for his gifts rose higher, his admiration for the young believer rose in proportion. Then, as they had plenty of money for the moment, and nobody could tell what might happen before it was necessary to return to England; and as, in the meantime, it was very important that Agnes should be trained to her new position, Roger took care that she should get accustomed to as much luxury of living as Swiss hotels could furnish. He had commenced teaching her French (as much as he knew) almost as soon as they crossed the Channel; and before the summer was over he got a French maid for her, which was the first penalty poor Agnes had to pay for her happiness. But in the early part of that wonderful summer, before Mademoiselle ar-

rived to remind Mrs. Trevelyan that she was still mortal, the two wandered about together like two travellers just out of Paradise. Roger's mind and powers were stimulated, though he did not know it, by constant intercourse with a mind fresh and pure and more lofty than any he had before encountered; and for the time, what he had learned put on a semblance of life, even to himself, as if it came from his own original intelligence. Thus the light which was in Agnes's eyes, as she regarded him, threw a kind of delightful confusion on the face of things, and half persuaded even her young husband, as it wholly persuaded herself, that the radiance was within and not without.

During all this long summer there did not once enter into Roger's life that shadow which pursues Englishmen all over the globe. He said to himself, in the fulness of his heart, that it was impossible to be bored with Agnes; not that she had a great deal to say in her own person, or was amusing to speak of; but Roger had never in his life before felt himself so clever, so interesting, so full of sense and story and illustration, as he did with this fair ignorant understanding creature, hanging on his lips, drawing out of him her first knowledge of the world, and of art and of nature, of books and men. She drew out of him

so much that he never knew to be in him, that Roger rose in his own opinion; the light of her interest and tender curiosity brightened up the reminiscences of his school-days, and of his college, and of all he had learned and all he had forgotten. There was not a detail of his short life that was not as interesting to Agnes as if he had been the greatest hero that ever lived; and, happily, there were few things in Roger's life which he would have been ashamed to tell to his wife. As for her own experiences, she had so few, that the homely details which made a brief appearance now and then, only amused Roger, and did not wound his pride; and everything went on like a romance or a fairy tale.

To be sure, this was a state of things that could not last for ever. Roger did not choose to exhibit his bride at the public table, or to convey her from place to place in public conveyances. He chose to make his bridal tour *en prince;* and as they had plenty of money for the moment, and desired no society, their *tête-à-tête* continued almost uninterrupted. True, he was now and then hailed by some passing acquaintance on a mountain-side, which even princes could only ascend on foot, or in the republican equality of a glacier; but his devoted attendance upon "my wife" was generally enough to satisfy these ad-

miring and surprised spectators that an addition to the party was undesirable. No letters came from home to disturb the felicity of the youthful travellers—none, at least, to Roger—and Stanfield's letters to his daughter were not too frequent, and contained nothing when he read them, which annoyed her husband. Thus affairs proceeded as smoothly as possible during all the summer, the sole danger to which Agnes had been subjected being an introduction, in passing, to some old ladies and two or three young men, the first of whom stared at her very curiously, though there was little time for conversation. Such trifling encounters, however, were not enough to arouse in Roger's mind any alarms as yet about his wife's powers of acquitting herself in society. But with the waning summer this idyll of existence also began to show signs of ending—not that it was less agreeable or lost any of its attractions—but it became necessary to think of settling somewhere for the winter, which was an idea that involved many arrangements foreign to their present habits. The first indications of this change to Agnes was the proposal of the French maid, and the arrival of a box from Paris containing a supply of dresses, which she regarded with incredulous amazement and a touch of dismay.

"It is your *corbeille de mariage,*" said Roger, who was delighted by her surprise. "I dared not have offered you such a thing at Windholm; but it's all right now. I managed to bring off that old grey dress you used to wear long ago," he went on, laughing, "so you may be sure they'll fit. I don't want Mrs. Trevelyan to extend the fame of the dressmakers at Windholm."

Agnes did her best to admire her new possessions and to give due thanks for them; but the surprise was not by any means so pleasant a one as Roger expected. When she was alone she even shed a tear or two over the dresses she had been wearing all the summer, thinking all the time that they pleased him; but, fortunately, Agnes was not possessed of that unhappy susceptibility which is wounded by the least doubt of absolute perfection in all its possible arrangements. On second thoughts, she made up her mind that her husband had done the kindest thing in the world in the kindest way, not wounding her by immediate suggestions, but leaving her time to see her deficiencies a little, and to awaken to a desire of mending them. This incident, however, though she accounted for it so satisfactorily, awakened just a suggestion of inquietude in her mind. When her dresses had to be renewed so entirely, might not some

similar process be necessary in respect to her manners and modes of speech and of thought? She swallowed the little injury to her pride conveyed in this idea, and turned again, as her father might have done, to the reason of the matter. Certainly it was reasonable that with her dress her general demeanour should need remodelling too. And then her next thought was of an appeal to Roger, in whom, notwithstanding this suggestion, which was a little humbling to her vanity, she had a profound trust, untinctured either by pique or suspicion.

"I wish you could order me a set of new manners as easily," said Agnes, with a little laugh, in which there was a touch of anxiety; "that must be a great deal more important than the dresses. I can't put off my stupid ways as I can put off my old gown——"

"Heaven forbid!" said Roger. "I don't want any change in your ways; on the contrary," said the young man, laughing, "if you will, to oblige me, always imagine yourself in the parlour at Windholm and wearing your old grey gown, you will be perfect, my darling; your manners don't require any change."

"Ah!" cried Agnes, who, even amid her great happiness, could not but be conscious with a certain

pang that the parlour at Windholm and the grey gown had been left off for ever, "but that is not possible; and besides——" here she paused a little, not knowing how to say what she was conscious of feeling, that whether for the better or the worse, she, too, had made a certain progress in these three months. She was changed, and was conscious of the change; and perhaps the thought of having to go back to recover the bearing which her husband found perfect was not much more consolatory to her than if he had said, as she half expected, "You will improve in time."

"No," said young Trevelyan, more seriously, "to be sure, it is not possible. I only mean that you must not think any more about your manners than you did then. There is a kind of manner which you have, Agnes—and, in case I should be partial and biassed in respect to you, I may say your father has it too—not in the least like a great lady, to be sure; a kind of a look of being mistress of your own place and the first there, and, at the same time, a kind of a look of being everybody's attendant and the last there. I can't describe it," said the young man—"when a woman of the world happens to have such a manner, and knows how to manage it, she gets quite a reputation on that

score. There, now, I am no great dab at descriptions. I suppose you know what I mean?"

"Not quite," said Agnes, with a smile; but she was as pleased as if she understood it every word. "I always thought my father's manners were beautiful. I am so glad you think so too, Roger." This compliment, which her husband had paid quite involuntarily, was more agreeable to Agnes than any amount of eulogy addressed to herself. It gave her spirit to take pleasure in her new wardrobe—to investigate all its pretty details, which was a business in which Roger aided her, well pleased; and even to swallow, without many wry faces, the dreadful potion of the French maid.

Thus it was, with a proper equipment in every respect worthy of the bride of Sir Roger Trevelyan's only son and heir, and regardless of expense, that Agnes was carried over the Alps and entered Florence, in which place Roger had concluded to stay for the winter. They were both young and strong, and above fear of the Tramontana, and young Trevelyan concluded that it was one of the best places possible for forming his wife's mind, and accustoming her gradually to society; from which it will be perceived that familiarity was bearing its usual fruits, and that Roger began to lose

the first freshness of that instinct which, in the earlier days of his love and even of his marriage, had impressed the sense of Agnes's superiority upon his mind. He began to lose that sense a little, as was natural, she herself being the person in the world least aware of it; and as she was in the position at present of taking all her knowledge, and apparently all her ideas from him, master of all desirable information, as he seemed to Agnes to be, it was not wonderful if the design of forming his wife's mind grew upon the pleased intelligence of the young husband, who had discovered himself to be so much cleverer than he had before thought he was.

For this end, Roger decided that he would take his wife to all the picture-galleries and expound everything to her. He even went to the trouble of intending to read up all about Dante and Savonarola for the instruction of his pupil; and he meant to perfect her in French, with the aid of Mademoiselle Louise, and to begin Italian with her, which he did not himself know; —not to speak of the English reading, which the young man, still in the height of his love-dream, had proposed to Agnes. He meant that his wife should be no pretty lay figure, to be put up with on account of her prettiness; on the contrary, he was quite decided in his resolution to form

her mind, and make her worthy of himself and her new station. As for Agnes herself, she was quite willing, and, indeed, eager. The evenings they were to spend together over their books—the mornings they were to roam together among the pictures—appeared to her eyes like the opening vistas of an endless paradise. And it had never yet entered into her mind to doubt that Roger knew a hundred times more than she did, and was quite equal to the charge he had taken upon himself. If he had married Miss Rogers, who was the baker's daughter at Windholm and had been to a very good boarding-school, she would have brought the young man very speedily to his senses, and to a due estimate of his position; but as for Agnes, she had no opinion whatever of herself, and so long as her sense of right and wrong was not touched, nor her exquisite natural taste and instinct of fitness interfered with, she was the most docile pupil in the world.

Thus commenced the most serious and eventful period of these two young lives. They were left alone in their ignorance to make the best of it—the reins being chiefly in Roger's hand, who had undertaken so confidently to make their six months in Florence not merely a pleasant pause, but a beautiful preface and course of prepara-

tion for life. A man more apt to be affected by chance influences did not exist than the young man who thus bound himself to the special line of action which his present thoughts considered necessary. "Of course, I do not mean that we are never to go into society," he said, as he discussed his plans. And as for Agnes, though she was a little nervous, she had no desire to avoid society. She had, on the contrary, a settled idea in her head, that society, in Roger's sense of the word, was in reality that brilliant, beautiful society which most young people of any brains look for eagerly but vainly on their introduction to the world. Agnes expected that everybody she encountered would be capable of brilliant talk, of wit and wisdom, equal to the books of which during the last summer she had read more than ever before in her life. The dull and stupid gossip to which she had listened at Windholm seemed to her to belong entirely to that atmosphere in which her father and herself had got lost, somehow, out of their natural sphere. But now the beautiful and seemly were to be the rule and order of her life. She expected to meet with nothing less than that exquisite consideration for others, that power of divining elevated sentiment, and calling forth the real treasures of the mind and spirit, which was surely what social intercourse

meant in its highest development. Thus she went forward serenely to her first contact with such people of her husband's acquaintance as were to be found in Florence. In such a refined and elevated sphere, Agnes felt confident that her little shortcomings would be gently judged. She had no more conception of refined impertinence utterly outdoing any attempt ever made in that way by the humble Windholm community, than of any other wicked thing in that little, amusing, equivocal Anglo-Italian world.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The First Step.

ROGER TREVELYAN and his wife were in the Pitti Gallery when the first encounter occurred with the outside world. They were going over the pictures in a leisurely way, in all the case of having six months before them. Agnes, like most uncultivated people, was not quite sure what to think about the pictures. Notwithstanding the fine perceptions of her mind, her eyes were so entirely uneducated that this new delight was not nearly so great a delight as might have been supposed. The first effect produced upon her by the new world of art was, indeed, to make her feel very stupid, and confused, and shaken in her ideas of beauty, as she passed from one to another of those little marvellous squares of canvas which Roger informed her were among the most celebrated in the world. Agnes grew more and more silent

and puzzled. She felt sure the fault must lie in herself, but that did not soften the pang of her disappointment; for, to be sure, she had expected, as was natural, that, to recognise and appreciate the works of genius, it was only necessary to look at them. She was so silent and so puzzled, that even Roger, who in his heart did not care a straw for the pictures, but who was aware what it was right to say about them, was somewhat disappointed too, and began to entertain a half suspicion, not disagreeable to his mind, that, after all, Agnes was not so "superior" as he had supposed, even in the natural qualities of the mind which he proposed to form.

They had come at length, however, to that sombre room in which the picture of the "Visitation" occupies the central place; and as Agnes stood and looked at it, feeling very tired in body and confused in mind, a sudden gleam of light at last came out of the picture into her face. She stood, leaning heavily on Roger's arm, with her eyes fixed wistfully upon it, her lips apart a little, and a certain startled sudden perception in her face. It did not occur to her at that moment that she was looking at a fine picture; it only came into her mind suddenly, like a flash of lightning, that she was a young wife, probably destined to stand in need of all the

tender sympathies of womankind, and that there was no woman in the world likely to accost her with the look of that Elizabeth. Such was the first impression drawn by Agnes from the new perplexing Art, to which she had been introduced with so little preparation. Any loftier meaning that there might be in the scene escaped her for the moment. She stood in a trance of interest regarding the divine mystery of nature which linked these two women; Mary, with her secret in her heart—Elizabeth, with the look that divined, and asked, and replied, all in a moment. The young spectator, too, might have her secret, but for her there was no Elizabeth. Thus Agnes stood looking at them, without thought of anything more divine, with a tender envy, as at two women. For her, too, that sacred mysterious hour of consciousness might arise, but she had neither mother nor friend to read it in her eyes. This was the thought that made her rapt countenance shine; but at that moment the room filled suddenly with a rustle of silks, and a breath of perfume, and an English voice. The voice said—

"This way, my dear; here is the picture I wanted you to see—'The Visitation,' by Albertinelli. I believe it is considered his best work. Come to this side, this is the best light."

"Ah! mamma," said another voice, "how

can you? You know I detest that debased cinque-cento taste; it looks precisely like one of the windows in Brussels, only the distance is green instead of blue; and just the kind of ordinary superficial sentiment that suits the vulgar taste."

Agnes shrank back involuntarily before this interruption, and, without knowing it, brought herself and her husband, by that movement, in full view of the new party, who regarded them with a frank and straightforward "British stare." But this stare, and the new interest awakened by it, drove the "Visitation" out of everybody's head.

"Trevelyan, by Jove!" cried one of the male attendants of the new comers.

And before Agnes could recall her thoughts, her husband had been shaken hands with all round with acclamations. In the confusion of her ideas, the young wife was not aware of the look of consternation which came upon her own face as she felt herself thus standing upon the threshold of the new world. But even at that moment Agnes caught a look from the eyes of the elder lady, which was about as different as could be imagined from the look of Elizabeth—a look of inquiry, not to say suspicion; and then the poor girl felt herself dissolving some-

how into the air, till she was suddenly recalled to herself by Roger's voice.

"I am very glad to have an opportunity of presenting my wife to you, Lady Charlton," said Roger. "We have only been in Florence a few days. Agnes, Lady Charlton, one of our neighbours at home. How lucky that we should have met here!"

"Quite extraordinary!" said Lady Charlton; and she made Agnes a magnificent curtsy, to which the young wife responded by a timid bow and the wistful little momentary smile which was habitual to her when she met any one for the first time—a smile which said so plainly, "You are better than I am; be good to me"—that few people hitherto had been quite able to resist it. The new acquaintance, however, showed no symptoms of being mollified. She said—

"I am sure I am charmed to make Mrs. Trevelyan's acquaintance. How very odd, Lottie, that we should have heard from Cornwall so lately, and nobody mentioned the marriage! How fortunate you are in being able to keep it all snug and to yourself!"

"Oh, that is all over, long ago," said Roger. "I suppose everybody has forgotten us by this

time. We are at Panizzi's, on the Lung' Arno, and I hope you will come and see us."

"I shall do myself the pleasure of calling on Mrs. Trevelyan," said Lady Charlton, with dignity. "We are at Panizzi's too. I want my daughter to admire the Albertinelli. Now, Lottie, stand here; this is the best light."

"Then we shall look for you shortly," said Roger, with the best grace he could muster, and he nodded to Jack Charlton, who, for his part, took off his hat with an air of profound respect to his friend's new and pretty wife.

Agnes was so tired, and so startled by this unexpected event, that this move was the only thing that saved her from a catastrophe and faint; for the heavy atmosphere of the gallery, the stifling air produced by the braziers, which had already been placed there, the unusual exertion both of mind and body, and finally Lady Charlton, with her perfume and her large party, taking up all the air that remained in the room, had altogether had an overwhelming effect upon the young creature fresh from Swiss air and liberty. Roger was much alarmed when he found that she could scarcely speak as he led her away—first alarmed, and then, as was natural, puzzled and ready to be angry.

"You don't mean to say that it is Lady

Charlton who has done this?" he said, with hasty chagrin and vexation, and hurried her downstairs at a pace which made matters worse. "Put down your veil, at least," said the young husband. "Good heavens, Agnes! don't let people imagine that you are frightened by the mere appearance of a woman you don't know."

Poor Agnes felt the steps flying from under her; but at last there was some air to be had, and she managed to retain her senses and consciousness till she reached the welcome shelter of the little brougham which awaited them. Then after a moment, when she had steadied a little, she made her defence.

"I was not frightened," she said; "it was the want of air, in the first place, and the fatigue; and then the picture——"

"What of the picture? I did not think you at all excited by the pictures," said Roger, who was rather in the mood for scolding, "as some people are." He was extremely fond of his wife, and alarmed by her paleness, but he was only human, and he could not refrain from giving her this little prick with his spear in passing. Greater self-denial would have been impossible to flesh and blood.

"No," said Agnes; "only it made me feel somehow how *alone* I am; that was all."

"How alone you are! by Jove," said Roger,

growing rather red, "that is a very poor compliment to me."

"Hush, you know I didn't mean that—I mean, I have not a woman in the world belonging to me," said Agnes—"mother, nor sister—nor friend scarcely;" and the young wife sighed again, and thought of the Elizabeth, totally unaware that Roger breathed an internal "Heaven be praised!" as he sat by her side.

"Oh, friends are not difficult to pick up," he said, lightly. "Only, Agnes, for heaven's sake don't look so scared when I introduce any one to you. You asked me about your manners the other day. There is nothing in the least wrong with your manners; but, whatever you do, don't look frightened. That is the only thing I ask of you. The Charltons are neighbours, and it would be lucky if you took to each other; but I don't mean to dictate to you who you are to like; only just this one thing—don't, I beseech, whatever happens, put on that scared look."

"Did I look scared? I did not know," said Agnes, with a sudden blush; "it was with being so tired, I suppose."

"I hope so," said her husband. "You must not be tired another time. And as for the picture, it is not what one would call a great picture," he continued, returning to the process

of forming her mind; "it is a good specimen of the master, no doubt, but he is not of the first rank. It is better not to be enthusiastic at all than to have an enthusiasm badly placed," Roger added, with a little laugh. He was half in jest, to be sure, in this latter observation, but, at the same time, he was whole in earnest. He was not a connoisseur, nor learned in the fine arts in his own person, but he was sufficiently got up on the subject to be aware that one of the most general symptoms of ignorance is enthusiasm for the wrong thing, and against this it was necessary to guard his pupil without delay.

This little conversation was over before they reached the hotel. As for Agnes, she was not affronted, as many young wives in her position would have been. She had managed to make the transition from love-making to marriage under the most auspicious circumstances during the summer, and had already accustomed herself to that conjugal criticism which at the first shock is sufficiently disenchanting to every young girl, who marries out of a fantastic, youthful paradise into a real, everyday world. She had got over it, as it is comparatively easy to do, when there is real love at the bottom; and having, like her father, a great calm of nature which it was difficult to ruffle, Roger's objections to her paleness and

momentary want of sympathy did not rouse her to arms instantly, as it might have done in some cases. And to tell the truth, though a little startled by her first aspect, Agnes was not in the least afraid of Lady Charlton. Thus they drove back to their hotel without the least breach of the peace, and resumed their studies in the evening as if nothing had happened. But, nevertheless, something had happened. Roger was distracted from his French conversation (in which, notwithstanding his efforts on Agnes's behalf, he was himself far from being strong) without knowing it, by the fact that Jack Charlton was in the house, who knew everybody he himself knew, and, no doubt, could tell him what people were saying at home about the marriage—which Roger could not help supposing must possess a certain interest, at least, for everybody in the county. Lady Charlton had looked a little impertinent, and so had her daughter, and, on the whole, the young husband could not help feeling that this accident had disturbed the honeymoon tranquillity and absorption of his life.

In fact, before the evening was over, Roger found an opportunity to stray off into the more public regions of the hotel in search of his old friend. He said—"I'd like to have a little talk with Jack Charlton; he and I used to be great

friends. I'll leave you for half an hour to your novel, Agnes." When he was gone, however, it was not to the novel that Agnes addressed herself. Novels grow less interesting when one is in the full tide of one's own history, and subject to experiences more exciting than anything in fiction. The young wife let the book fall when Roger left her, and took to thinking. It was impossible, even had she possessed the temper of an angel, for Agnes to suppose that she had met with a gracious reception from her husband's old friend, and involuntarily, before she was aware of it, Mrs. Freke's warnings and her own thoughts thereupon returned to her mind. What if she were about to find out for herself all the disadvantages of an unequal marriage—to encounter women not gracious and sympathetic, like the ladies of her imagination, but hard and unfriendly, who would criticise and see through her, and convict her as an impostor? All this gleamed like a vision of affright across her mind; but strangely enough, Agnes was not dismayed by it, as she had been after that conversation with Mrs. Freke. She was, so far, more foolish than she had been then, that her youthful confidence in love was stronger than ever. She smiled in her heart as she thought how little it could matter to Roger, who loved her, what Lady

Charlton or anybody said. She herself would be glad to please his friends for his sake; but having him, the rest of the world was secondary and unimportant to Agnes. With this thought she dismissed what little inquietude she had, and went back with a smile to her novel, and laughed at Roger's guilty face, when he returned, not in half an hour, but in an hour and a half. For his part, he was so glad to find that his absence had not vexed her, that the clouds of his inquietude passed at least from his face; and so there came a peaceful and pleasant close to the evening, which they might well have kept as a fast and vigil, had they known what consequences it was to produce.

These consequences, however, were not in the least tragic to start with, nor was there any conspiracy commenced against the peace of the young wife or the faithfulness of the husband, as sometimes occurs, at least in books. No such intentions were in the mind of Lady Charlton or her daughter, as they held a consultation on the subject over the fire. They were seated there both of them cozily enough, with the ordinary details of work and books, and pretty trifles on the table, which are necessary to the comfort of Englishwomen in general. Miss Charlton, who was a few years older than Agnes, had, like

Agnes, a novel in her hand; but my lady, for her part, had passed the age when novels are interesting. She was warming her slippered feet at the bright wood fire, and making herself comfortable; and naturally, unoccupied as she was, interrupting from time to time her daughter's enjoyment of her book.

"I don't quite know what to do, Lottie," said Lady Charlton, with a little contraction on her forehead; "Roger Trevelyan was always an honest boy. He never would have dared to introduce his wife to me as he did, unless it had been all right. He never would attempt to take *me* in, I am sure—and yet Beatrice *did* tell you he was in some scrape or other, you say? I do wish you would put down that ridiculous novel a little, and attend to me."

"Yes, mamma, this moment," said Miss Charlton, dutifully; and she glanced over the next page, and then threw her book on the table. "What queer pictures these sort of people give of society!" she said, laughing. "Such guys we must all appear outside, if anybody believes them. I think one ought to take to writing novels one's-self, to set these ridiculous creatures right."

"I beg you won't do anything of the sort," said Lady Charlton, with asperity, "and ruin all your prospects. Please to give me your attention,

Lottie. I was speaking of the Trevelyans. I daresay Roger has been very foolish, but I can't help feeling a conviction that he never would have tried to deceive me, and that it must be all right."

"Probably, mamma," said Miss Charlton.

"*Probably*, mamma!" echoed her mother. "I wish you would take the trouble to show a little interest in what I am saying."

"You know I never could bear gossip," said Miss Lottie. "Of course it's all right. Roger Trevelyan is much too great a goose to take anybody in; and as for the little girl, she looked pretty, I thought—pretty, but out of her mind with fright or something. It would be fun to hear Roger coaching her how to behave."

"I wish you would not use such words," said Lady Charlton. "I don't think Roger himself knows very well how to behave. Beatrice is dreadfully *manièrée*, and Sir Roger is something too frightful to think of. Besides, it is not in the nature of things that a man could teach a woman how to conduct herself in society. I have seen clever women out of the lower classes who picked it up wonderfully well; but it is quite ridiculous to think of getting any good in that way from a man."

"Well," said Lottie, laughing, "if she is not

vulgar or stupid, it would be great fun to take her up and coach her one's-self."

"Lottie, I desire you will do nothing of the sort," said Lady Charlton, with natural irritation. "I can't imagine what next you will suggest. I think I will call to-morrow, as I promised Roger; perhaps Jack may find out something about them from some of the men he is always picking up, and it will be easy to discover, when we begin to talk, what sort of people she belongs to. Only, don't set up one of your ridiculous friendships, as you are so fond of doing; I cannot permit that."

"Friendship for a little bit of a girl who admires a cinque cento picture, and is frightened for *you!*" said Miss Lottie, incautiously, with the least possible emphasis. "I hope I have not quite come to that."

"You might at least speak with civility," said Lady Charlton. "It is very little help I can get from a consultation with you. If she was frightened, poor thing, it was not wonderful—a girl belonging to the lower classes of society suddenly brought into contact with a person of my position. It is the only thing that prepossesses me in her favour," said my lady, poking the fire, and approaching closer her velvet slipper, to which Miss Charlton only replied by a laugh;

and the conversation ended by the younger lady resuming her novel, and the elder one—for the Tramontana was blowing outside—drawing nearer to the cheerful fire. These were not the ladies of Agnes's imagination—which meant so many feminine versions of the early knights of Arthur, before falsehood made its appearance at the Round Table. Miss Charlton knew a great deal more about the Round Table than Agnes did, and could have discussed it in all its bearings, artistical and philosophic; but she was much too experienced a woman to believe in the existence of any such piece of ideal furniture in the everyday world.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.